

Trelill holy well, Helston, Cornwall

Conservation and restoration



Historic Environment Projects

Trelill holy well final APJ July 2014

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The conservation work to the well was carried out by Joe Morris and Tim Lake of Rescape Cornwall and the fencing by Topan Fencing of Liskeard (Ian Wilton, Mike Mander, John Duffy, Brynn Jenkins, Greg Pattenden-Oxenham). Turf for the roof and the enclosure was supplied by Neil Rankin and Kevin Pascoe of Cornish Turf Merchants.

The Project Manager was Ann Preston-Jones.

The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of Historic Environment Projects and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

Freedom of Information Act

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Cover illustration

The holy well in January 2014, near the end of the project

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Abbreviations

- EH English Heritage
- HER Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Historic Environment Record
- HE Historic Environment, Cornwall Council
- MMS Monument Management Scheme
- NGR National Grid Reference
- OS Ordnance Survey
- PRN Primary Record Number in HER

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1 Summary

This report describes the results of a project to repair and restore Trelill holy well, near Helston, Cornwall. The well is located in the bottom of a shallow valley, beside a stream, and until three years ago, was in serious, declining condition, due to the combined problems of flooding, scrub growth and deteriorating masonry. However in 2011, with the co-operation and help of the new owner of the site, work began on a plan to restore the monument.

The work to restore the well was co-ordinated by Cornwall Council's Historic Environment Projects team's Monument Management Scheme. It was funded by owner Mark Rowe, the Monument Management Scheme, and Wendron Parish Council, and carried out with the help of an enthusiastic team of volunteers. The first step was to clear the engulfing scrub; the next was to remove a stone hedge from across the stream, whose blocked culvert was causing flooding and a build up of silt. With these basic items achieved, the next step was to consolidate and repair the structure itself, before finally installing a fence to protect the monument. The well will be maintained in the future by the volunteers and by Wendron Parish Council.

Trelill holy well is a Scheduled Monument, Cornwall 1, and number 30102 in Cornwall Council's Historic Environment Record (HER). It is located at NGR SW 6768 2847.

2 Introduction

2.1 Project background

This report describes the repair and restoration of a holy well located in a valley bottom on farmland near Helston. Having been neglected for many years, the condition of the holy well had deteriorated to the extent that it was covered in trees, ivy and scrub, had stonework in poor condition and was subject to constant flooding.

In 2011, with the advent of a new and sympathetic owner, the restoration of the well began. Vegetation was cut and cleared and measures taken to relieve flooding.

In 2012-13, the work was continued and completed through further vegetation clearance, repairs to the building and installation of fencing, to separate the well from the surrounding agricultural land and define an area for future management by volunteers and the parish council.

2.2 The monument

Trelill holy well is a small granite-built well-house comprising a single chamber with stone benches along the inside walls, and a smaller arched well flanked by two niches in the back wall. Assessment in 2000 suggested that although the building has the appearance of a medieval structure, and is on a site of medieval origin, it may in fact have been built of recycled medieval carved stone in the eighteenth century. As such, it represents a picturesque feature associated with nearby Trelill House (Preston-Jones, Sturgess *et al* 2003, 19-22). Nonetheless, its good preservation and the belief that it might be medieval gave Trelill holy well the privilege of being the first monument to be scheduled in Cornwall, nearly ninety years ago, in the 1920s.



Fig 1 Location map

2.3 Monument details and constraints

HER PRN 30102

Scheduled Monument Co 1; National Heritage List Entry No 1006743,

Listed Building Grade II* 66314; National Heritage List Entry No 1142042

Location NGR SW 6768 2847

3 Summary history of the monument

3.1 History

The history of Trelill holy well is fully described in an assessment made over ten years ago (Preston-Jones, Sturgess *et al*, 2003). A brief summary based on that is given here.

The first mention of the well is in a deed of 1423, when it is referred to as *Fenton Wendron*, Wendron being the patron saint of the parish and of a now lost medieval chapel at Trelill (Henderson 1960, 478; Lane-Davies 1970, 88). A cross of probable eleventh century date also once stood here but was moved first to Helston and then to Bonallack in Constantine in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Langdon 1896, 331-2; Langdon 1999, 20). Its original location at Trelill is not known precisely although Langdon (1896, 331) says that it formerly stood by the side of the path leading to the holy well.

The relationship between the parish church dedicated to St. Wendron, some 2.6 km or 1.6 miles distant, and the holy well, is explained in a local tradition which states that it was intended to erect the church of Wendron near this spot but that the devil in the shape of a crow objected to the locality and removed the new building stone by stone to its present site: the porch, however, was allowed to remain and we now see it as the holy well (Henderson 1960, 478).

Unlike many holy wells, Trelill's has no known curative properties; however it was visited 'for the purpose of dropping a pin accompanied by a wish into its magic waters (Quiller Couch 1894, 86).

Trelill holy well is not recorded between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it is only in the nineteenth century that descriptions, drawings and photos are recorded, the earliest being that of JT Blight in 1856 (Blight 1856, 59) (Fig 6). This and subsequent images all show that the well has changed little over the last 150 years.

3.2 The setting of the well

Although the well is not shown on the Tithe Map of 1843 (Fig 2) it is marked on the Ordnance Survey's first edition 25 inch map of 1878 (Fig 3). Here, the holy well is shown in a small marshy area incorporated into the field to the north-west. A field boundary which ran up to it until 2013 had not yet been built and this is reflected in Blight's 1856 illustration, which shows the building free-standing (Fig 6). By the time of the 1907 map (Fig 4) the field must have been drained and the enclosure surrounding the well and the boggy patch removed and replaced with a boundary running right up to the well and across the stream. A photograph taken in *c*1937, held at Falmouth Public Library (catalogue number E74) shows that this incorporated a step-over stile (Preston-Jones, Sturgess *et al* 2003, front cover). The date at which this stile was replaced by the present gateway is not known, although a gate is seen in the photo in Lane-Davies' 1960 book on *Holy Wells in Cornwall* (Lane-Davies 1970, photo, page 64: although this was a wooden one, not the more recent metal one).

4 Condition of the monument

4.1 History of management

This section summarises the account in *Trelill Holy Well, Cornwall: Archaeological Building Survey* (Preston-Jones, Sturgess *et al* 2003, 11-12)

In the first known depiction of the holy well by Blight in his *Crosses ... of West Cornwall*, published in 1856 (Fig 6), the roof is shown heavily overgrown with ivy. Otherwise, it looks much as it does now with the same large stones framing the doorway although, as noted above, the hedges running up to the sides of the well had not been built at that date. In 1894, Quiller Couch observed that the building was dry and paved with stone – a contrast with its present state with the floor of the well-house waterlogged and roughly stony: if the paving survives, its presence is not immediately obvious. Ivy not only overwhelmed the roof but was also growing inside. A photograph of the front elevation, taken by Thurstan Peter in 1914 (Peter 1914, opp 312; also reproduced in Preston-Jones, Sturgess *et al* 2003, 10, fig 5) also shows the roof rather overgrown and likewise suggests that few changes have occurred to the structure, other than the possible rearrangement of a few stones above the door arch.

A photograph taken in 1937, at Falmouth Library (catalogue number E94; Preston-Jones, Sturgess et al 2003, 10, fig 6), is the first to show the roof bare of ivy and in this, a number of the stones look very loose and rather vulnerable.

4.2 Condition at the outset of this project

The evidence of the building is that other than one or two dabs of cement, the well was not repaired at all in the course of the twentieth century, and since the report of 2003, has further deteriorated. At the point at which the current initiative began, the well had therefore been neglected for many years, resulting in a gradual deterioration of the structure. Damage was being caused by extensive scrub, ivy and tree growth, coupled with erosion as water from the adjacent stream, dammed by a blocked culvert through the adjoining wall, poured through the walls of the building instead of following its natural course. As a result, the earth bedding mortar had been comprehensively washed out of the walls, and many smaller stones lost, so that light could be seen through the walls in many places and the structure was in a fragile condition. It had only been saved from more extensive collapse because some of the stones forming the walls are such large blocks of granite.

4.3 Risk

Prior to the work taking place from 2011 onwards, the well was assessed as being at high risk of damage and in declining condition, and for the last two years has been published on English Heritage's Heritage at Risk register. As a result of the recent work, it was re-assessed in 2012 as being still at high risk, but in improving condition. The work described in this report has enabled it to be removed from the register.

5 Project background

Within the last two years the well has passed into more sympathetic ownership and Cornwall Council's Historic Environment Projects team has been working with the new owner to improve its condition. The first step was to request a visit from Keith Weston, the English Heritage Structural Engineer covering Cornwall. He produced a report (section 7 and appendix 2) which was then used as the basis for an action plan (appendix 1). Work through Cornwall Council's Monument Management Scheme in 2011-12 enabled all scrub to be cleared from the walls and roof of the well, and silt to be removed from around and within the building; the field wall which had been blocking the course of the stream was also dismantled. As this work has never been fully

reported on, the results are summarised below, in section 8, along with the results of the final phase of conservation work.

6 Aims and objectives of management work at Trelill holy well

6.1 Aims

The aims of the work described in this report were to stabilise the structure of the holy well and to enclose it from surrounding agricultural fields, so that it can be maintained and managed in the future as a monument.

6.2 Objectives

The following objectives are quoted from the project design (Preston-Jones 2012, 3-4):

The conservation work to the well will be that which is the minimum needed to secure a structure which is currently at risk of deterioration and collapse. Every effort will be made to ensure that the work is discreet and that the appearance of the building is maintained as far as possible.

This will be achieved by carefully consolidating and repointing the building. Small amounts of re-building will be done, with small stones, to support the existing masonry and some stones may be re-set to improve the structure and aesthetic of the well. As little of the original roof structure survives, the building will be finished with a soft roof capping.

Erection of an enclosing fence in the vicinity of the structure will have a notable impact on its setting, although this will be mitigated by selecting a fence of good design which is in keeping with the significance of the well. The fence will enclose the well at a minimum distance of 3 metres and is intended to enhance, rather than detract from, its setting. It will highlight the significance of the monument as a historic feature and secure an area around it that is safe from disturbance and which can be maintained by volunteers.

The proposed enclosure will be of metal railings to provide long-lasting protection for the well, and to be in keeping with its status as a significant monument.

7 Structural survey by Keith Weston, English Heritage

The following notes are reproduced from Keith Weston's 2011 report to Phil McMahon, then Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Cornwall. His photos, which provide a comprehensive pre-restoration record of the state the structure, have been included as an appendix (2).

I visited this building with Phil McMahon and Ann Preston-Jones on the 7th September [2011] to assess its structural condition and advise on remedial works.

The stonework has deeply eroded joints with one area having no material in the joints. Testing the stonework by hand shows that the stones are secure but as further joint material is lost they will eventually become loose resulting in movement of the stones with possible localised collapses occurring. It is therefore essential to consolidate the joints. Wide joints can be galleted to avoid excessive joint material. Prior to the consolidation the vegetation has to be removed from the stonework assessing at the time whether large roots can be removed without causing damage. Ideally the vegetation should be dealt with as soon as possible. At the base of the walls some of the stonework is hidden by silt which will have to be removed.

There are two missing stones at the south-west corner to be reinstated. The roof also has to be protected and a grass capping seems the best approach. Finally there is a

stonework barrier across the adjacent stream which can cause a rise in the water level with possible damage to the building. It is therefore preferable to remove the barrier.

8 Results of the conservation work

The conservation work to Trelill holy well has been achieved in gradual stages over the last few years, as a result of the hard work of many individuals, both volunteers and contractors. All stages are summarised below, in approximately the order in which they occurred.

8.1 A new beginning

Although it had been in benign ownership for a long time before the work described in this report, Trelill holy well had not enjoyed any positive management for many years. Hence there had been a gradual deterioration in the condition of the structure. Although surveys undertaken in 2000 by Jo Sturgess and Eric Berry identified work that was needed to repair and restore the well (Preston-Jones, Sturgess *et al* 2003, 14-22), it was not until ten years later, after a change in ownership, that it finally became possible to undertake the much-needed work. Mark Rowe, the new owner of Trelill Farm, was very aware of his responsibilities for this historic monument, and readily agreed to its restoration. A plan was drawn up (appendix 1) and with the agreement of Phil McMahon, then Inspector of Ancient monuments for Cornwall, work began in 2011. This involved the following steps:

8.2 Silt clearance

The first task was to remove silt from the rear of the well, to make access easier, to relieve pressure on the building and prevent stream water from flowing through the well's walls. Work began on 4th May 2011. Initial de-silting was done by a mini-digger organised by Mark Rowe. A watching brief was carried out by James Gossip, to ensure that no damage was done to the well in the process (Fig 8).

The digger worked to within half a metre of the well, and all subsequent work to remove silt from the back wall of the well was done by hand, by the volunteers, who carefully revealed the lower parts of the walling on the north-west and south-west sides of the well (Fig 12).

8.3 Vegetation clearance

Initial silt clearance was followed on 17th May 2011 with the first vegetation clearance. As the vegetation so completely obscured the well, this was a mammoth task, undertaken by volunteers under the overall supervision of James Gossip. Vegetation included a mature hawthorn rooted in the west corner of the well, blackthorn, ivy, brambles, and other less invasive species (Figs 9 and 10). Other more limited clearance of re-growth was undertaken in September 2011, again in 2012 and finally in January 2013, just before work started on rebuilding.

8.4 Removing the hedge across the stream

Removing silt from the back of the well showed that the hedge built across the stream on the north side of the well – which from map evidence appears to have been inserted at some time between c 1880 and c 1907 – was the main cause of the trouble. A small culvert carrying the stream under the hedge would have required regular maintenance to prevent it from becoming blocked. Without such maintenance, and once blocked, the hedge prevented the stream from running properly, leading to the problems seen in silt build-up and water cascading over the hedge and through the walls of the well. To prevent this from happening, either the culvert had to be regularly cleared or the hedge had to be entirely removed. In the event, the latter option was chosen. In September 2011, following agreement from Mark Rowe, the volunteers dismantled the hedge across the stream, to ensure a smooth flow of water past the well (Fig 12).

8.5 Consolidation and repointing

After a further visit by the volunteers to clear vegetation regrowth and any further silt accumulation, conservation specialists Joe Morris and Tim Lake began structural work at the well on 28th March.

The overall objective of the work was to repair the well in such a way as to provide stability whilst ensuring that, as far as possible, the present appearance of the building would be retained. Where needed the structure and aesthetic was improved by resetting some of the external stones. Where internal areas needed rebuilding, this was done to match the existing style and filling any voids with appropriate stone.

In Joe Morris's words:

'We had been delayed by unseasonably cold weather which was unsuitable for lime mortar work. We began by carrying on where the volunteers had left off, removing what was left of the vegetation on top of the well. This was mainly roots which were well established in the stonework. We removed the remaining roots and began to scrape off the loose earth from the roof and the wall joints. We removed enough earth from the roof to expose all the stones but not to dislodge them, as we didn't want to risk destabilising the roof structure. This gave us a good base to start to point with mortar between the roof stones and to fill in any gaps or holes to maintain the overall shape of the roof.

We then removed one large stone from the rear corner of the well which was badly pushed out by roots and was in danger of falling off. We re-set this stone on a mortar bed and replaced the corner roof stone above it. We did a similar thing on the other side, (the stream side) of the well and re-laid a stone which had slumped to an angle and looked out of place. It was also quite unsafe. We assessed the rest of the well and decided that the rest of the structure was sound and although some stones had moved over time, they were stable and there was no need to remove and re-lay them.

We then began to point the well, using hydraulic lime 3.5 with coarse sand at a ratio of 3 parts sand to one part lime. Where necessary we filled in gaps and holes using stones from the surrounding ground, many of which had most likely come from the well.

The roof was tackled at the same time as the pointing, new stones were laid where it was deemed necessary, either to form the shape of the roof, or just to plug gaps.

The section of roof on the stream side was in particularly bad shape, it had very few stones left, just lots of earth mortar covering the structural stones of the top of the wall and forming the inner roof structure, as a result the exterior of the well appeared lopsided when viewed from the back. Stones were laid here to balance this out visually.

During this time the temperature was low, and we protected the structure with hessian each night, but after one particularly cold night we realised that some of our mortar had been affected by the cold and had perished, we raked out these areas and rerepointed them. After this the temperature increased but with the increase came rain, so we continued using the hessian and also covered the entire well with a tarpaulin at night to prevent rain hitting the roof and running down the walls.

When we had finished the external walls and the roof, we began to repoint the inside of the well, which was a challenge in terms of space and light, but the principle was the same, and we cleaned out the joints, re-pointing and filling gaps with small stones where necessary. Work finished on Tuesday 16th April'.

A return was made at a later date to repoint the inner well which initially had been left untouched but whose delicate state became increasingly apparent as the repointing progressed and increased the solidity of the overall structure. Soon after work was completed, the volunteers gathered again to paint the mortar joints with mud, to make them less conspicuous, and more in keeping with the pre-consolidation appearance of the building.

8.6 New fence

Although the fields surrounding the well are not grazed at the moment there is a possibility that they may be in the future, so there was a need to replace the hedge which had been removed from the stream with some type of stock-proof boundary. The need for a new boundary gave the opportunity to think more creatively about an arrangement which did not impinge as obviously on the well-house as the hedge and gate had done. Alternatives such as a Cornish hedge, wire, or wooden fence were considered but in the end rejected in favour of employing a version of the successful model established at St Ruan's Well, Grade, in 2001 (Preston-Jones, Sturgess *et al* 2003, 22-25), and laying out a small enclosure around the well.

At St Ruan's Well, a metal park-pale type fence set over 2 metres from the well on all sides was installed to create an enclosure around it measuring overall 8 metres by 5.5 metres. This was chosen so as to provide a secure stock-proof boundary which being painted black would be long-lasting but discreet enough to allow a connection with the surrounding landscape. It also defines an area within which careful management appropriate to the monument's well-being can be focussed.

After agreement had been obtained from Mark Rowe, the new fence for the well was designed, fabricated and installed by Topan Fencing of Liskeard. The fence was designed by Ian Wilton, and groundworks and installation were carried out by Mike Mander, John Duffy, Brynn Jenkins and Greg Pattenden-Oxenham. Initial groundworks were carried out on 17th July 2013, with final installation on 11th and 12th September 2013. Installation of the fence involved the following stages:

- Initial clearance of vegetation from around the well, which given the very wet spring of 2013 and subsequent hot, dry weather in early summer had grown unexpectedly high
- Lifting and repositioning of two granite gateposts
- Grading of the ground around the well
- Removal of the old metal gate for restoration
- Survey of the ground prior to fabrication
- Fabrication of the fence
- Final installation

The fence utilises the space within the former gateway adjoining the well to define the size of the enclosure on the south side. It runs away from the hedge to the south-east of this gateway for 9 metres, then turns through 90 degrees to run down to and across the stream and terminate on the Cornish boundary hedge running parallel with the opposite side of the stream, thereby leaving a space of 5 - 6 metres in front of the well (See Fig 14). Overall it measures on average 12 by 6 metres. The granite posts and old iron gate were retained but repositioned to provide access to the enclosure by the path from Trelill Farm to the south-west.

The fence is of galvanised mild steel, approximately 1.2 m high, comprising 50 x 12 mm posts concreted into the ground at 1 m centres. There are five horizontal 20 mm bars set at approximately 250 mm centres. The fence is painted with ProtegaLac PU90 which is a high quality fast-drying enamel paint.

The gate was restored by de-rusting, painting with the same as the fence, and welding on a new bar at the bottom, to replace on old one which had totally decayed. It is closed using the old chain found around it when it was removed.

8.7 Turfing the roof of the well

The decision to finish the roof with a capping of turf had been made at an early stage, as being the most appropriate means of providing a weatherproof capping for the building but as it turned out, this was a very appropriate choice since the repair work showed that very little, if any, of the original structure of the roof remained (see below, section 9).

The work was done by James Gossip and Ann Preston-Jones of Historic Environment Projects, Cornwall Council; Richard Mikulski, the Community Archaeology placement at Historic Environment, and a team of volunteers including Martin Andrewes, Brett Archer and Chris Harris.

The turf used was supplied and delivered by Neil Rankin and Kevin Pascoe of Cornish Turf Merchants. It was grown very locally, and cut only the day before laying. It is hoped that this local sourcing will give the turf a better chance of survival on top of the holy well.

The method used was as follows:

- 1. As the top of the well was very uneven, it was first smoothed out by filling all the gaps between the stones with earth dug from the bottom end of the field near the well. This proved very difficult because the soil was very shallow, very clayey, and very stony. It had to be loosened with a pick before shovelling up, and then broken up by hand or wetted with the worst of the stones removed before adding to the top of the wall, where it was firmed down. Luckily, the clay-like consistency proved useful in helping the soil to stick on the well's roof, especially on the steeply sloping sides. Nonetheless, enough was acquired to enable the top of the well be covered so that only a few stones remained sticking out.
- 2. After this, two layers of turf were laid upside down. The idea is that these will rot down and provide a good bed for the top layer of turf to root into. The bottom layer was allowed to overhang the edges and then turned in, to give a neat edge along the top of the walls.
- 3. Finally, the top layer was then placed over and where necessary that is, mainly on the steep sides pegged down using small pieces of split bamboo.

Sufficient turf was acquired to turf the enclosure as well, on this and a subsequent occasion.

Regular visits were made to check on how the roof was faring, especially in the first six to eight weeks. English Heritage advises that the turf should root within three weeks: so it is crucial to keep checking during this time, to make sure that it remains pinned securely and especially that it does not dry out. In this case drying out was not a problem: the concern was rather that with exceptionally wet weather after the work had taken place, it might be damaged, slump or slip off.

Within a week, some of the turf had indeed slipped off the steepest stream-facing side. However in mid February, after the wettest January for almost 250 years, most of it was still in place and in good condition (see front cover).

In the longer term, it will be vital that it is maintained by periodic cutting to ensure that woody species do not take root and threaten the structure in the future.

8.8 New path, parking area and signs

As a final stage to the project, Mark Rowe laid out a new permissive path to the well, following the line of the hedge that runs in a NE-SW line between the well and the farm track to the SW. This is fenced from the field and Wendron parish council has agreed to keep it cut and cleared in the future.

A new parking area, capable of taking up to six cars, has been cleared, beside the farm track to the SE of the farm buildings at Trelill. To direct visitors to this and from the car park to the well, a series of signs were commissioned from Croft Castings. Being of cast metal, painted dark blue and silver, these will hopefully prove durable as well as clear.

9 Results of associated archaeological recording and monitoring

The archaeological input to this project included liaison with the owner, contractors, volunteers and all others involved. It included work with volunteers to clear scrub and monitoring when the conservation work was undertaken, to ensure that all work was undertaken according to the details in the project design, or that any need for variation was discussed. Any features revealed in the course of undertaking the work were recorded, most notably the stonework which had been hidden beneath silt on the south-west and north-west sides of the building.

All work was recorded with photos and notes. The newly-revealed sections of the building were hand-drawn on the original elevations and then digitally plotted to produce the updated elevations seen in Fig 18.

Observations on the nature of the building were made in the course of the project, as the building work and silt removal revealed parts of the structure never hitherto seen. These are discussed below.

9.1 Silt build-up

There had been a massive build-up of silt and earth around all elevations of the building apart from the main, south-east face. This was at its deepest on the south side, where the accumulation reached up to 0.5 m deep. All of this accumulation must have occurred since the building was constructed in the 18th century but most may have occurred since the changes of c 1900 in the immediate landscape. Some may have been done deliberately in order to level the ground when the gateway was installed (on photographic evidence, after 1900), but following this, some hillwash may have occurred as the fields to the south were cultivated. At the back (NW) of the well, the build-up of silt was directly associated with the construction of the hedge between the well and the stream-side boundary to the north, which blocked the stream once its culvert was no longer maintained.

In the immediate vicinity of the building, all this build-up was removed by hand. This confirmed that the material was of modern origin. Removal of the silt and earth opened up the building and revealed features of its construction, which are described below.

9.2 Stepped out foundation

In 2000, it was noted that 'the footings towards the front of [the well's] north-east elevation are stepped out approximately 0.20m, no doubt to help support the wall where the stream runs alongside' (Preston-Jones, Sturgess *et al* 2003, 14 and fig 9).

With removal of silt from all around the building, this feature became even more apparent (Fig 19). It exists on all sides of the structure except the front (SE) elevation. Its distance from the wall above is not even, making the foundation appear to be set on a slightly different orientation to the well-house itself. The greatest projection is on the south-west corner, where it extends out beyond the main line of the well's wall by up to 0.45 metres. Its origin remains a mystery however. It may, as previously suggested, simply represent a foundation for the building, to provide stability in the stream-side location, or it may represent the footings of an earlier building on the same site. Two facts: one that the present structure is thought to be of 18th century origin and possibly a rebuild of an earlier, medieval, chapel or well whose cut stones it incorporates, and

two, that the foundation has a different orientation to the main part of the building, make this a possibility.

9.3 The walls

In 2000, it was noted that in several places the originally earth-mortared walls incorporated patches of lime mortar associated with repairs (Preston-Jones, Sturgess *et al* 2003, 14 and fig 9). With the removal of silt from around the back of the well-house, one area of structural instability and old repair became particularly obvious.

As fig 20 shows, at the south corner of the building is a very large granite quoin stone resting above small blocks of shillet stones, and not on more squared granite, which would give greater stability (and as is the case at all other corners of the building). A misaligned projecting eave-stone above also points to a former episode of collapse in this corner. It looks as though a granite quoin has been lost from the base of the corner and been replaced by the very irregular stonework seen now. Here, the walls were deep pointed and straightened as far as possible but this place of inherent instability will need to be regularly monitored.

9.4 Roof

Once the vegetation and the loose earth had been removed from the roof, this was found to have very little obvious structure. Many stones on top of the building were loose and all were found to be lying directly above the corbelled slabs which form the 'ceiling' inside the well chamber. The only exception was in a small area near the front (SE) end where an area of pitched stone, fairly solidly set, suggested that this may have been original. The rest seemed entirely random and many could have been from field clearance. This seems to suggest either that the roof has been extensively robbed or that there never was a 'proper' roof structure and that the rather rough finish may have been designed to enhance the impression of an ornamental ruin.

As far as possible, the stones were repointed *in situ* with little attempt to recreate any structure, except on the north side where there was almost no stone and some was added to give a more symmetrically domed finish to the roof (above, page 7).

9.5 Post-holes

Removal and repositioning of two large granite gate-posts from the hedge to the new fence as well as the excavation of holes for posts of the new fence gave snap-shots of the stratigraphy in the area. This proved for the most part to be quite simple, with an upper layer (0.2m to 0.3m) of turf and topsoil coming down on to dark grey and yellow-brown silts. On the line of the old gateway, between the hedge and the well, the ground was generally stonier, presumably reflecting the fact that at one time the hedge extended right up to the well, with the gate being inserted at a later date, replacing a stone stile (see above page 3).

Possibly the most interesting observation was the fact that in a fence hole dug at the foot of the hedge, three metres south-west of the well, the dark silt at the bottom of the hole filled with water and smelt extremely stagnant. The reason for this is uncertain: either the water table had been encountered (although it did not appear in any of the other holes) or the hole may have intersected the spring feeding the well.

10 Conclusions/discussion

This project has had a substantial effect on the setting of the well and on the building itself. Most notably, the feeling of intimacy created by the bower of vegetation which in recent years had grown up and around it has disappeared, while the well which was formerly unpointed, is now freshly repointed.

However, there is no doubt that without the work that has taken place the life of this lovely structure would have been limited. To confirm this, it is only necessary to look back at the structural surveyors report (section 7). Signs of instability in the building, noted there, were more than confirmed when work actually began on the building: the tree roots were found to have caused great damage in pushing out stones with resultant loss of structure and instability for those left in the building. The roots had penetrated the structure to the extent that in places, three courses of stone had to be removed in order to get rid of them. Given the scale of the structure, these three courses represent nearly half the height of the building!

Now, the building is stabilised, is revealed in its full glory, and is accessible all around. It is in fact more like the little building that JT Blight illustrated in 1856 (Fig 7). It sits in its own specially-created enclosure so is secure from surrounding agricultural activity. Volunteers who have been involved in its restoration, as well as Wendron Parish Council, will continue to care for it. Previously, access was difficult but a clearly-signed permissive path has now been installed. Finally, as the well is now secure, it has been removed from the Heritage at Risk register.

11 Recommendations

11.1 Silt and drainage

Inside the well, a thin layer of silt and stone lies over a large slab forming much of the floor of the well. At the front of the small 'well chamber' an upright stone with a lip can be felt (rather than seen) – the lip allowing water to feed from the well and to what is assumed will be a culvert running under the slab. Outside, the build-up of silt is such that the water cannot possibly run away in this direction – but with a little work to remove the build-up, there may be a chance of getting the drainage working properly again.

This would be a great achievement, allowing the building to function as it was originally intended and providing easier access to the interior of the well.

11.2 Future maintenance

Regular maintenance will be vital to ensuring that the well, its enclosure and the path leading to it do not immediately start deteriorating again. It is recommended that a routine maintenance plan is adopted not only for the well but also for the fence, gate and the path leading to the site. The following is suggested as a draft:

MANAGEMENT PLAN

Once a month

- Cut grass in enclosure approximately once a month in spring / summer
- Cut grass on path leading to well approximately once a month in the spring / summer
- Clear any litter

Once every six months

- Cut vegetation on roof, twice a year: in the spring and in the autumn. The grass should be cut by hand (for example, using shears), to about 6 ins high. The aim should be to maintain a grassy cover and prevent the growth of woody species. Any woody growth can be controlled by cutting and treating the cut stump with a herbicide, taking care to prevent spread of herbicide onto grass
- Check that there is no debris built up against the fence at the rear of the well; remove if necessary
- Clear debris from well and check drainage of water from well

• Turf on roof of well may need regular watering in summer if weather is dry

Once a year

- Check condition of railings and gate and touch up paint if needed. ProtegaLac PU90, which is a high quality fast-drying enamel paint, was used to paint them when first installed. The colour code is RAL9005 and the outlet for these paints is Neals Coatings on 01935 826030.
- Cut vegetation in hedge to side of path leading to well
- Take monitoring photos of all sides of the well; check against previous year's pictures. If any stonework or mortar appears loose contact English Heritage regarding any necessary repairs

12 References

12.1 Primary sources

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

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12.2 Publications

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Quiller Couch, M & L, 1894. Ancient and holy wells of Cornwall, London

Peter, TC, 1914. 'The Summer Excursion', Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall, Volume 19, Part 3, photo opposite page 312

13 Project archive

The HE project number is **146209**

The project's documentary, photographic and drawn archive is housed at the offices of Historic Environment, Cornwall 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. Digital photographs stored in the directory ... \Images \Sites Q-T \Trelill
- 3. English Heritage/ADS OASIS online reference: cornwall2-185351
- 4. This report text is held in digital form as: ..\HE Projects\Sites T\Trelill 2012-13\Report\Trelill holy well report



Fig 2 Tithe Map, c1840



Fig 3 First Edition of the Ordnance Survey 25 Inch Map, c1880



Fig 4 Second Edition of the Ordnance Survey 25 Inch Map, c1907



Fig 5 Ordnance Survey digital mapping showing the site and its environs (2009)



Fig 6 Blight's 1856 illustration of Trelill holy well



Fig 7 The main elevation of the well before work began



Fig 8 Clearing silt from behind the well The well-house is immediately behind the arm of the mini-digger, hidden beneath a shroud of dense vegetation



Fig 9 Volunteers begin clearing scrub and ivy from the well in 2011



Fig 10 Volunteers clearing scrub and ivy from the well in 2011



Fig 11 Volunteers remove the hedge and blocked culvert from the stream beside the well in 2011



Fig 12 Volunteers remove the hedge with blocked culvert from the stream beside the well, then clear further silt from behind the well in 2011



Fig 13 Consolidation and repointing of the well by Joe Morris of Rescape Cornwall, assisted by Tim Lake, in April 2013



Fig 14 Plan of the new enclosure around Trelill holy well



Fig 15 Mike Mander and John Duffy levelling ground and shifting gateposts in June 2013



Fig 16 Mike Mander, Greg Pattenden-Oxenham and Bryn Jenkins installing the new fence in September 2013



Fig 17 Installing the turf roof capping



Fig 18 Elevations of the restored building, drawn by James Gossip



Fig 19 Building details: stepped out foundation/footings can be seen at the bottom of the wall (with Tim Lake repointing the wall)



Fig 20 Building details: the poorly north constructed corner



Fig 21 The holy well restoration almost complete: with proud owners, Mark (right) and Ed (left) Rowe of Rowe Farming

Appendix 1

2011 Plan of campaign to improve the condition of the monument, and access to it

Summary and timetable for proposed action:

Winter/Spring 2011

- Clear silt from rear of well (MR; cost?)
- Clear silt from immediate vicinity of building (APJ/JG and LAN; probable cost to HE: staff wages 1 day £260 plus volunteer contribution say 6 people)
- Carefully clear vegetation from building (as above, JG and LAN)
- Unblock culvert through wall adjoining well (as above, JG and LAN)
- Clear vegetation from surroundings (MR or LAN)

Spring/Summer 2011

- Lay out permissive path to holy well (MR; cost?)
- EH structural engineer to visit and inspect building

The next step will depend on the structural engineer's advice. If he says that the building is unsafe, then we will need to get a conservation accredited surveyor or architect to specify the repair work. If it is concluded that the building is not about to fall down, then I have been advised by Phil McMahon, the Inspector of Ancient Monuments (IAM), that it will be OK for us to get a builder (eg Darrock and Brown) to specify the work. Phil would also be happy for us to have someone like Eric Berry to oversee the repair work.

Summer/autumn 2011

- Surveyor/architect/builder visit to inspect the well, with APJ/MR/EB and then specify repair work. (Cost not yet known; depends on surveyor's recommendation.)
- Assess the desirability of laying out a small enclosure around the well (but NB this will be dependent on management to keep it clear of vegetation)
- Consider the management of the culvert in the wall beside the well: would this be better removed and replaced with a fence?
- Write a proposal for repair to be agreed by EH IAM, hopefully for taking forward in 2012 (APJ, 1 days work, £260)

Autumn 2011

• Another LAN visit to check on the well, clear back any summer growth, and ensure that the culvert is free for the forthcoming winter

Spring summer 2011/2012

- Undertake repairs to holy well
- If appropriate, install small enclosure around the well
- Install a sign at the top of the path leading to the well

Autumn 2012

- Write a report on the work
- Compile a simple management plan for MR and LAN to follow

Appendix 2 Report of English Heritage Structural Engineer 2011

I visited this building on the 7th September, to assess its structural condition and advise on remedial works. The building and the conditions noted are shown on the attached photographs.

The stonework has deeply eroded joints with one area having no material in the joints. Testing the stonework by hand shows that the stones are secure but as further joint material is lost they will eventually become loose resulting in movement of the stones with possible localised collapses occurring. It is therefore essential to consolidate the joints; first using a trial area to decide the treatment of the joints. Wide joints can be galleted to avoid excessive joint material. Prior to the consolidation the vegetation has to be removed from the stonework assessing at the time whether large roots can be removed without causing damage. Ideally the vegetation should be dealt with as soon as possible. At the base of the walls some of the stonework is hidden by silt which will have to be removed. If there are defects beneath the silt I can advise further if necessary.

There are two missing stones at the south-west corner to be reinstated. The roof also has to be protected and a grass capping seems the best approach. Finally there is a stonework barrier across the adjacent stream which can cause a rise in the water level with possible damage to the building. It is therefore preferable to remove the barrier.

Keith Weston, English Heritage

NB pics are as a separate file –