

Trevoze Head, St Merryn, Cornwall Archaeological Watching Brief



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Archaeological Watching Brief

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The Project Manager was Dr Fiona Fleming and Carl Thorpe assisted with the fieldwork.

The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of Cornwall Archaeological Unit and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

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Abbreviations

CAU	Cornwall Archaeological Unit
CRO	Cornwall Record Office
HE	Historic England
HER	Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Historic Environment Record
MCO	Monument number in Cornwall HER
OS	Ordnance Survey

1 Summary

Cornwall Archaeological Unit (CAU) undertook an archaeological watching brief during the undergrounding of high voltage electric cables on Trevose Head. No buried archaeological features were identified during the works. A range of finds, however, were recovered from the trench spoil, including three flint cores and a number of beach pebbles, two sherds of medieval Lostwithiel Ware and a sherd of Barnstaple Ware. The site is within an area of known Lithic scatters of Mesolithic date and the early medieval settlement of Trevose, and the unstratified finds support the existing evidence for prehistoric human activity on the headland and the survival of a small early to later medieval settlement centred on the modern day Trevose Farm. Future recommendations would include fieldwalking where conditions are suitable, along with appropriate archaeological mitigation of any future groundworks undertaken in the area.

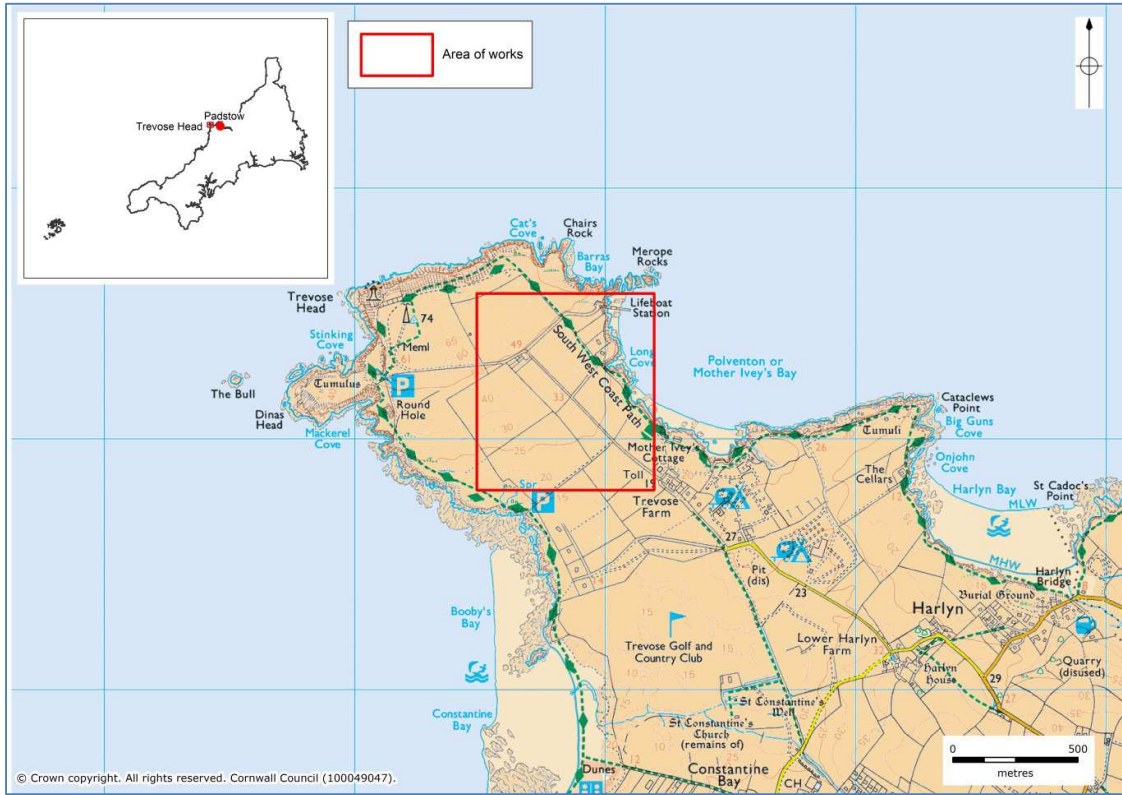


Fig 1 Location map.

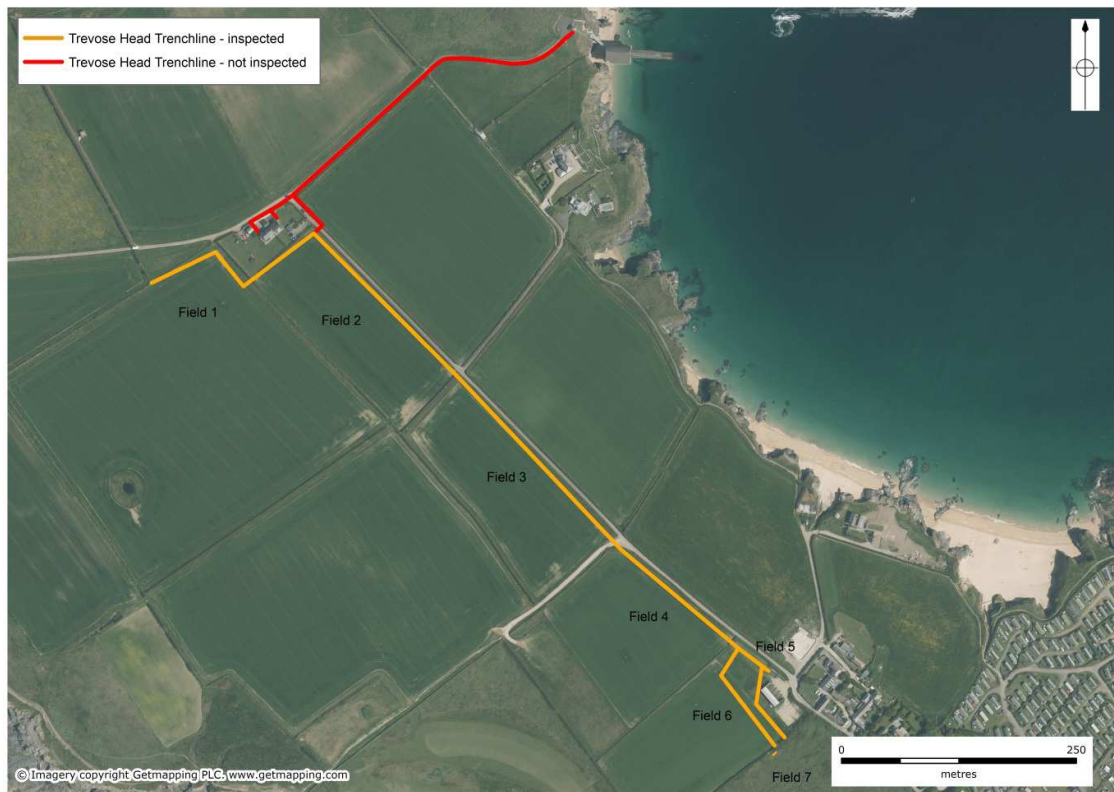


Fig 2 Site extent.

2 Introduction

2.1 Project background

Cornwall Archaeological Unit (CAU) was commissioned by Matthew Lewis of the National Trust to undertake a programme of archaeological watching briefs during the undergrounding of high voltage electricity cables.

2.2 Location and setting

Trevoze Head is situated to the southwest of Padstow on Cornwall's north coast, a prominent and impressive headland of high clifftops that extends out into the Atlantic Ocean, broken on the northeast side by Mother Ivey's (Polventon) and Harlyn Bays and on the southwest side by Constantine and Booby's Bays (Fig 1). The underlying geology is predominantly Devonian Period slate and siltstones of the Trevoze Slate Formation and Rosenum Formation with interbedded Devonian Period limestone and mudstones of the Marble Cliff Limestone Member along sections of the cliff-line, occasionally interrupted by unnamed igneous intrusions of the Devonian to Carboniferous Periods. Across the southeast end of the headland there are superficial deposits of Quaternary Period blown sand (British Geological Survey 2019).

The historic landscape character (HLC) of the headland plateau is predominantly that of post-medieval enclosed farmland, with some modern enclosed farmland on its northwest tip and coastal rough ground along the clifftop edges. The medieval settlement of Trevoze, towards the southeast end of the headland, where Trevoze Farm stands today, was first recorded as 'Trenfos' in 1302. The name derives from the Cornish place-name elements *Tre*, 'farmstead' or 'estate', and *fos*, 'ditch' (Padel 1985; 1988). The *Tre* settlements of Cornwall are commonly accepted to have early medieval origins, probably established sometime between the 5th and 11th centuries (Padel 1985, 223-4). It is likely therefore that the post-medieval field pattern in the vicinity of Trevoze Farm obscures an antecedent medieval field pattern; this is borne out to some extent by the evidence from the c1840s St Merryn Tithe map and the OS 1st Edition 2500 map, both of which indicate some narrow fields with sinuous boundaries to the southwest of Trevoze Farm, which are characteristic of fields formed in the early medieval to medieval period and enclosed in the later medieval period respecting older boundary lines. A medieval field system (MCO25857) is recorded by the Cornwall and Scilly HER to the northeast of Trevoze Farm where signs of medieval ridge and furrow ploughing have been observed.

Archaeological Record (with selected HER numbers, prefix MCO, in brackets)

There is evidence of human activity on the headland from the Mesolithic period onwards, with numerous flint scatters recorded across the headland along the clifftops and several Bronze Age barrows. There is a possible Iron Age cliff castle suggested at Dinas Head on the northwest edge of the headland and possible crop mark evidence for two Late Iron Age to Romano-British enclosed settlements (MCO8826; MCO30006), on the nose of the headland to the east. In addition to the medieval farming settlement of Trevoze there is evidence for post-medieval mining and quarrying and a possible post medieval fish cellar (MCO18565) in Mother Ivey's (Polventon) Bay. A post medieval lighthouse and coastguard station were established on the nose of the headland and during the First and/or Second World Wars the headland was the site of a bombing observation post (MCO30007) and wartime beach defences along the edges of Mother Ivey's Bay.

3 Archaeological results

Excavation of the cable trench was undertaken by machine using a 0.5m wide toothed bucket and dug to approximately 1m depth. The northern section of the new cable trench had been excavated and backfilled prior to an archaeologist arriving on site (marked in red Fig 2). The section of trench covered by the archaeological watching brief extended across seven fields (Fig 2 and see Figs 4-17). The results from the watching brief are presented here by field number. All finds recovered were unstratified: their approximate location has been plotted in Figure 3.

Field 1

The section of trench in Field 1 had been excavated prior to an archaeologist arriving on site but remained open for inspection (Figs 4 and 5). The field was under plough and the trench in section revealed a 0.3m deep topsoil layer consisting of dark brown friable and relatively stone free silty clay loam. Below this was a 0.2m deep subsoil of dark reddish yellow slightly stony silty clay above shillet bedrock to the base of trench. No features were identified but a fragment of burnt flint and a rounded beach pebble were recovered from the spoil on the west side of the trench. Several Mesolithic flint scatters (MCO21720) are recorded across the extent of Field 1, the nearest of these within 100m of the core recovered from the trench spoil (Johnson and David 1982).

Field 2

The section of trench in Field 2 had also been excavated prior to an archaeologist arriving on site but remained open for inspection (Figs 6 and 7). The field was under pasture but the profile of the trench was similar to that of Field 1, with a 0.3m silty clay loam topsoil layer above 0.2m deep silty clay subsoil onto shillet bedrock to the base of trench. No features were identified in the trench but a flint core and several more rounded beach pebbles were recovered from the trench spoil on the west side of the trench.

Field 3

Field 3 was under pasture and the trench ran along a section of raised ground along its east side (Fig 8); this area had previously been excavated to install a modern water pipe. The profile of the trench was very mixed, with a large amount of redeposited topsoil mixed with weathered fractured shillet. No features were identified. Finds from the spoil included a further flint core, a sherd of Lostwithiel Ware (c 14th Century in date) and a fragment of notched slate (Carl Thorpe, pers comm).

Field 4

Field 4 was under pasture and the trench ran along its east side (Figs 9 and 10). The mean profile of the trench consisted of around 0.3m deep silty clay loam topsoil above a 0.1m-0.2m deep layer of yellowish grey clay loam above a 0.2m deep layer of dark reddish yellow silty clay above shillet bedrock to the base of trench. No features were identified and no finds were recovered.

Field 5

Field 5 was under pasture and the trench ran along its east side (Figs 11 and 12). The mean profile of the trench consisted of around 0.25m-0.3m deep silty clay loam topsoil above a 0.1m-0.2m deep layer of yellowish grey silty clay subsoil above weathered shillet to the base of trench. No features were identified. The spoil from the trench produced two rounded beach pebbles.

Field 6

Field 6 was under plough. An initial trench was excavated spurring off the southeast end of the trench in Field 5. The profile of this was initially similar to that of the trench in Field 5 but at about 20m the profile changed to comprise a 0.2m deep layer of pale greyish brown sandy loam topsoil above a 0.2m deep pale greyish brown sandy clay

which then compacted to around 0.5m depth from the surface (Fig 13). Below the compacted sandy clay was a 0.2m deep yellowish red silty clay subsoil above weathered shillet bedrock to the base of the trench. At about 65m the profile changed again to comprise a 0.35m-0.5m deep layer of yellowish brown sand below sandy loamy topsoil. This initially gave straight onto the shillet bedrock but at the southeast end of the trench the sand layer was not bottomed.

A second trench was then excavated in Field 6 as the first did not pick up the required cable connection (Figs 14 and 14). This trench spurred off from the northwest end of the trench in Field 5, crossing to the top end of Field 6 and running southeast along the field edge approximately 10m southwest of the first trench. The profile of this second trench again started off with a silty loam topsoil above a silty clay subsoil above shillet bedrock. At about 100m a layer of pale greyish brown sandy clay was visible below the topsoil, mixed at first but becoming cleaner sand towards the end of the trench where it formed a 0.7m layer of sand directly below the sandy clay loam topsoil; again not fully bottomed.

No features were identified in either trench in Field 6. Finds were recovered from the ploughsoil beside the trench: these comprised a small fragment of flint, two rounded beach pebbles, one with possible percussion marks, a rim sherd of Lostwithiel Ware (c 14th Century), two sherds of glazed Barnstaple Ware (c 17th Century) and a fragment of clay pipe (c1850) (Carl Thorpe, pers comm).

Field 7

An irregular pit was excavated by machine in Field 7 to locate the cable connection (Fig 16). The area was heavily disturbed by prior cable laying but was seen to consist of around 0.7m ploughsoil and loamy clay topsoil above clean sand to the base of the trench. No features were identified nor finds recovered.

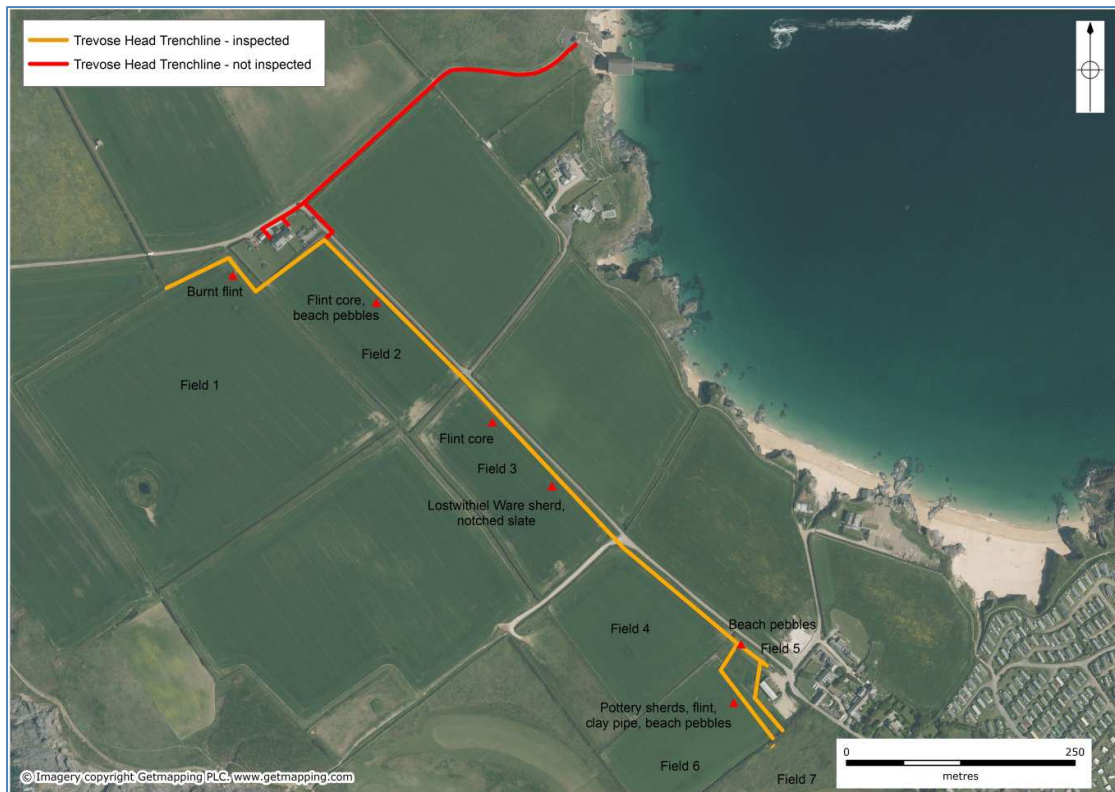


Fig 3 Approximate location of finds from trench spoil or ploughsoil.

4 Discussion

No archaeological features were identified within the excavated trench line and all finds recovered were unstratified. Nonetheless, the flint cores and beach pebbles are indicative of a background of prehistoric human activity in the area and correspond with the evidence derived from the numerous flint scatters across the headland, which are probably of predominantly Mesolithic date (Anna Lawson-Jones, pers comm).

The Lostwithiel and Barnstaple Ware pottery was recovered from within a 350m radius of Trevoze medieval settlement and may derive from that site, possibly moved further afield through ploughing and/or manuring activity.

Although the trench excavations produced no archaeological features the finds recovered did support the known evidence for human activity in the area during the prehistoric, medieval and post-medieval periods. The changes in soil profile towards the south eastern end of the site also correlates with the geological evidence for the Quaternary sand deposits, which showed that in places the blown sand sat directly above bare bedrock. The evidence from the trenches in Field 6 revealed the mixed area of silty clays and sand at the edges of this large superficial deposit and where this deepened to form clean blown sand over bedrock.

5 Conclusions

The results of the fieldwork and the assessment of significance allow for some recommendations to be made for further work. These recommendations are for guidance only.

There has already been some degree of fieldwalking across parts of Trevoze Head (Johnson and David 1982), which has produced substantial evidence for extensive flint scatters of Mesolithic date across the headland. However, this work was undertaken nearly 40 years ago and the area would benefit from further coordinated fieldwalking projects to consolidate and extend the body of physical evidence for prehistoric human activity on Trevoze Head. This would also contribute to a better understanding of the buried archaeological resource and would help inform future land management strategies.

6 References

6.1 Primary sources (in chronological order)

Tithe Map and Apportionment, c1840. Parish of St Merryn (licensed digital copy at CRO)

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

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

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Padel, O J, 1985. *Cornish Place-Name Elements*. Nottingham: English Place-Name Society

Padel, O J, 1988. *Cornish Place-names*. Penzance: Alison Hodge

6.3 Websites

<http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/> Online database of Sites and Monuments Records, and Listed Buildings

British Geological Society 2019. <https://www.bgs.ac.uk/data/mapViewers/home.html>



Fig 4 Trench along the north side of Field 1 looking southwest.



Fig 5 Trench in Field 1 looking southeast.



Fig 6 Trench across north side of Field 2 looking west.



Fig 7 Trench along the northeast side of Field 2 looking northwest.



Fig 8 Trench along the northeast side of Field 3 looking northwest.



Fig 9 Trench along the northeast side of Field 4 looking southeast.



Fig 10 Profile of trench towards the northwest end of Field 4 looking northeast.



Fig 11 Trench along the northeast side of Field 5 looking southeast.



Fig 12 Profile of trench alongside the barn in Field 5 looking southeast.



Fig 13 Profile of trench in Field 6 showing mixed sand clay layer above shillet bedrock.



Fig 14 Second trench dug along the northeast side of Field 6 looking southeast.



Fig 15 Profile of second trench in Field 6 showing clean sand layer below topsoil.



Fig 16 Cable pit in Field 7 showing sand at depth.



Fig 17 View along entire length of inspected pipeline, looking northwest.

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