

## SUMMARY

*An archaeological watching brief and Historic Building Record was undertaken by AOC Archaeology Group during November 2006 at the northern end of Smithick Hill, Falmouth, in advance of redevelopment. Various stone structures were recorded: a set of steps, a stone wall and a stone floor were all present, and appeared to all be of post-medieval date. The limited finds were porcelain, suggesting a 19<sup>th</sup> century date at least for some of the features, which may have been part of the same structure: the wall and floor surface associated with one another, and the stone steps accessing the upper floors.*

*The site is set in a quarry into the steep hill on the west side of the Fal estuary: the steps were near to the highest point of the site, the floor at the lowest point. The majority of the site was a platform of featureless bedrock that was the base of a quarry.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### Site Location (Figures 1 & 2)

- 1.1 The area of the watching brief and building record was situated at the bottom of Smithick Hill; its northern end, near Market Street, in the centre of Falmouth, Cornwall. The site is located at NGR (National Grid Reference) SW 8075 2910 (Fig 1), and is bounded by residential and commercial properties to the north, by a footpath to the east, and by residential properties to the southwest and southeast. The site is roughly rectangular in shape and measures approximately 0.41 hectares (Figure 2). For ease of description in the text, the site is assumed to be oriented north-south.
- 1.2 At the start of the Watching Brief, the site was derelict land containing the remnants of a property destroyed by fire more than thirty years since. The building was demolished into its own footprint, and was at one time a bookmakers, possibly previously a drapers. The demolition was near-total, with much of the site reduced to bedrock.

### Planning Background

- 1.3 The development involves the construction of residential units within a two part block. The layout will respect the current boundaries, quarry face and steps to the rear. An archaeological assessment in October 2005 identified limited archaeological remains, so further work was required. The local planning authority is Cornwall County Council (CCC). Archaeological advice to the council is provided by the Historic Environment Planning Advice Officer, Phil Markham.
- 1.4 In accordance with *Planning Policy Guidance: Archaeology and Planning* (PPG 15 and 16) issued by the Department of the Environment in 1990 (DoE, 1990) and the recommendations of the archaeological advisor, an

archaeological Watching brief and Historic Building Record was carried out as a condition of the planning permission (Planning Application: PA02/1460/06/R). The methodology was presented in a Written Scheme of Investigation (AOC 2006), following advice from CCC.

- 1.5 The Cornwall & Scilly Urban Survey project (CSUS), has identified the broad elements of settlement character that define Falmouth as a whole. The project identified six distinct Character Areas within the town's historic urban extent. The site lies within the area defined as the 'Cliff'. The 'cliff' is the steeply sloping area lying behind the main commercial axis incorporating New Street, Gyllyng Street, Smithick Hill, Town Quarry, Beacon Street and Prince Street.

### **Geology and Topography**

- 1.6 Falmouth is situated on the west bank of the Fal estuary, at c. 4m. The British Geological Survey map (BGS Sheet 352), indicates that the site is on Porthleven Breccia. Breccia is an aggregate of angular rock fragments. Smithick village developed around a stream which flowed into Smithick Creek, on the north side of Smithick Hill. The water from the stream is now piped underground.
- 1.7 The site lies on the south-western side of Smithick Hill near to the point at which it meets Market Street. Smithick Hill slopes steeply up the rising ground above the historic core of the town. The site itself is built into a level terrace probably created as a result of quarrying. The stone for much of the historic core of Falmouth evidently came from this area: the largest quarry is the large Town Quarry, now a car park. Other former quarries include the present Well Street car park and the site of a modern apartment block below the south end of Wodehouse Terrace. Buildings formerly located on the upslope sides of streets following the contour were built on linear platforms quarried into the hillside, as on the west side of Smithick Hill. There remain a number of exposed rock faces and outcrops
- 1.8 No geotechnical investigations have been conducted within the proposed development area.

## **2 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND.**

- 2.1 The information summarised in this section has been drawn from a Desk-Based Assessment produced by AOC Archaeology (AOC 2006). Falmouth developed out of two towns, Penryn and Smithick.

### ***Prehistoric (before c. AD 43)***

- 2.2 The earliest archaeological evidence in the area is from this period. It relates to a sub-marine forest found during excavations for the erection of a pier at Market Strand.

### ***Romano – British (c.AD 43-450)***

- 2.3 The only near find of Roman date is a 3<sup>rd</sup> century Roman coin found under floorboards in a burnt-out house along Arwenack Street in 2000.

### **Medieval**

- 2.4 Medieval settlement in the area is typified by a scatter of manorial and farm estates. Among these estates was Arwenack, recorded in 1264 as having been leased by Bishop Bronescombe of Exeter to Richard of Lanherne, the rector of St Columb Major. A later sixteenth century map shows the estate extending from Pendennis north to the present area of the Moor and Killigrew Street and west to Swanpool.

### **Post Medieval (c.1485 – 1900)**

- 2.5 The earliest focus of the settlement, other than Arwenack, lay around the small sheltered cove and beach at the mouth of the stream (now completely underground) which runs down the valley occupied by Berkeley Vale and the Moor. This settlement appears to have been very small, with two houses, a smithy and an 'alehouse' recorded as existing. The earliest name for the town was Smithick, later known as *Peny-cwm-cuic*, deriving from the Cornish for 'the head of the narrow vale'. This earliest expansion appears to have been organised by the Killigrews of Arwenack. One group of buildings lay around an open space at what is now the meeting point of Market Street, Smithick Hill and Market Strand, with one or two buildings with waterstairs on the shoreward side and others at the foot of Smithick Hill, the former route to Arwenack. Another cluster of houses lay to the north, running back from the shore along what is now the line of the eastern, lower, part of Webber Street.
- 2.6 The earliest cartographic evidence of the area is Saxton's map of 1576. This map shows the site of the Arwenack Estate but indicates that there is no substantial settlement in the area that Falmouth would later occupy.
- 2.7 The geography of the area was later considered ideal for a new port, and in 1660, a Royal proclamation changed the name to Falmouth following rapid expansion of the village. From at least the earlier eighteenth century the town was beginning to spread up the steep slopes behind its main streets. An 'old' meeting house was referred to on Porhan Hill – now Smithick Hill – in 1744 and this street was also the site of a small house set up in 1766 for sick seamen and other poor patients.
- 2.8 A map of Falmouth in 1773 shows continuous building along New Street and Swanpool Street, on Porhan Street, on parts of Smithick Hill and up all the major opes (narrow streets) and lanes running upslope from the main streets. Several chapels were built in the area around 1830: Wesleyan on Porhan Street (1829), Bible Christian on Smithick Hill (1830) and Primitive Methodist at Chapel Terrace (1832).
- 2.9 The Falmouth Tithe Map of 1841 shows the site as belonging to Lord Wodehouse but in the care of the citizens of Falmouth. No specific details are available for the site but it appears likely to have contained buildings. The first depiction of buildings in detail can be found on the 1880 Ordnance Survey Map, there are a number of buildings with an apparently open area to the rear. This is interpreted as being the top of the quarry face against which the steps can be made out.

- 2.10 The process of reuse of older houses was typical of much of the nineteenth century: the local historian Susan Gay observed in 1903 that many former 'quality corner' houses in Porhan Hill, Church Street, Arwenack Street and New Street 'have become tenement houses or shops'. This may describe the type of buildings present at the site.
- 2.11 As in other parts of Cornwall, the 1930s saw some urban slum clearance, principally in the densely built up area behind the main commercial axis. The later Ordnance survey maps show that buildings existed on the site until the 1960s after which time it seems to have been derelict. The layout and condition of the site changes little between 1969 and 2004 where the application site is shown to be vacant.

### 3 STRATEGY

#### **Aims of the Investigation**

- 3.1 The aims of the evaluation were identified in the Written Scheme of Investigation (AOC 2006) as being:
- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
  - To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
  - To record and sample excavate any archaeological remains encountered.
  - To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of any archaeological features and deposits.
  - To determine the extent of previous truncations of the archaeological deposits.
  - To enable Historic Environment Planning Advice Officer to make an informed decision on the status of the condition on the planning permission, and any possible requirement for further work in order to satisfy that condition.
  - To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation in order to inform the mitigation strategy as part of the planning process.
- 3.2 The specific objectives of the fieldwork were to:
- a) Draw together the historical and archaeological information regarding the site.
  - b) Inform whether archaeological recording of any extant remains is required.

- c) Inform whether palaeo-environmental sampling is necessary.
- 3.3 The final aim is to make public the results of the investigation, subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

### **Watching Brief Methodology**

- 3.4 The archaeologist observed ground works, positioned outside the working area of the mechanical excavator, in the normal working arrangement. Subject to safe access, the archaeologist entered the area to carry out close inspection.
- 3.5 Machining was done with a flat bladed bucket (toothless), and in horizontal spits.
- 3.6 Archaeological recording, where not precluded by Health & Safety considerations, consisted of:
- Limited hand cleaning of archaeological sections to establish the stratigraphic sequence exposed.
  - The collection of dating evidence from *in-situ* deposits and spoil scans.
  - A scaled photographic recording of representative exposed sections and surfaces, along with sufficient photographs to establish the setting and scale of the groundworks.
  - A record of the datum levels of archaeological deposits.
- 3.7 Records were produced using either *pro-forma* context or trench record sheets and by the single context planning method and will be compatible with those published by the Museum of London (MoL 1994).
- 3.7 A record of the full sequence of all archaeological deposits as revealed in the Watching Brief was made. Plans of features were drawn at an appropriate scale of 1:20.
- 3.8 Provision was made for the collection of bulk samples of a minimum 30 litres from appropriate contexts for the recovery and assessment of environmental data. No appropriate deposits were encountered.
- 3.9 All identified finds and artefacts were collected and retained. Certain classes of material, i.e. post-medieval pottery and building material may be discarded after recording with the prior approval of the archaeological representative of the local authority and the receiving museum.
- 3.10 Finds were scanned to assess the date range of the assemblage with particular reference to pottery. However, the finds assemblage was limited to porcelain.
- 3.11 At the beginning of the project (prior to commencement of fieldwork) the landowner and the Royal County Museum for Truro were contacted regarding the preparation, ownership and deposition of the archive and finds.

## Historic Building Recording Methodology

3.12 The steps leading up the quarry face to the east of the site were subject to the Historic Building Record. Following the Watching Brief, a stone floor and a wall were also recorded. The written account includes:

- The precise location of the structure, by name or street number, civil parish, town, etc, and National Grid reference and details of listing or scheduling.
- the date when the record was made and the name of the recorder.
- A summary statement describing the building's type or purpose, materials and possible date so far as these are apparent from a superficial inspection.

3.13 The illustrative record includes:

- Plans of all surfaces uncovered: the steps and the stone floor.
- An elevation of the wall.

3.14 The photographic record includes

- A general overview of the steps.
- Detail of the stone floor.
- An overview of the stone floor.
- Elevation of the wall revealed in the Watching Brief.

## 4 RESULTS

- 4.1 The topography as revealed during the excavations was a steep slope at the top of the hill, with a near vertical drop caused by a quarry cut, leading to a lower area with two roughly flat terraces. The hill sloped down to the east from 23.30mOD to 17.33mOD, a drop of over 1 in 2. This may represent unaltered topography on the edge of the stream, the rest of the hill quarried away (009), providing both building material and a platform suitable for housing to a depth of 11.00mOD. The base of the quarry cut as deep as 7.84m in the northeast corner of the site. Towards the northern end of site there appeared to be a geological fault (008), where the bedrock was small weathered pieces. This later became the area where a floor was established, a floor that remains *in situ*, and was therefore examined using minimal disturbance.

### The Stone Wall

- 4.2 Set next to the western face of the quarry were the remains of a stone building (005). The remains consisted of a wall running parallel to the quarry face, standing up to 2.98m high, for a length of 11.32m. At the northern and southern ends of the wall, partial returns were evident, but had largely been truncated. There was no remnant of an eastern wall to fully define the extent of the building.
- 4.3 The width of the wall could only be determined through measuring the north and south remnant walls. That to the south was 0.60m wide, that to the north 0.54m wide, so it is thought likely that the main wall is of similar thickness. Part of this wall is to be retained *in situ* after the development. The wall appeared to be built directly upon bedrock at the base of the quarry cut rather than within a specific construction trench, but without demolishing the structure, this could not be confirmed. The southern and northern walls of the building were both at right-angles to the main wall.
- 4.4 Each part of the wall of the building was built in the same manner, being roughly coursed blocks of local stone bonded with lime mortar that contained limited hair and few visible coarse components. The stone blocks were roughly squared, measuring up to 420mm by 240mm by 200mm, although many were smaller. The wall may have been repointed, since there was little sign of erosion or weathering.
- 4.5 At intervals of 0.94m (3'1") were horizontal wooden beams each 0.10m square, set flush with the face of the wall. These were in poor condition, and a maximum of four were present across the 2.98m height of the wall. These were not string courses, but rather studs which had boards 0.20m (8") wide nailed to them, forming panelling. The boards were in very poor condition, only four fragments of panelling surviving.
- 4.6 Because the wall is retained *in situ* within the development, dating the structure is very difficult. However, the nature of the mortar suggests a date of possible 18th century manufacture: there is no apparent coal ash/dust in the fabric which suggests that the lime was made in a flare kiln where fuel was

separate from the lime. Mixed feed kilns where fuel and limestone superseded flare kilns from the mid-18th century, but may not have fallen from use locally for years later.

### **Stone Floor**

- 4.7 To the east of the site was a floor made from flagstones, cobbles and bricks (004). It had no direct relationship with the stone wall, but given its proximity, some form of relationship seems likely. The floor was set within what appeared to be a small fault in the geology, but may equally be part of the cut of the quarry (008).
- 4.8 The materials forming the floor were bedded upon a layer of very dark brown silty sand that contained weathered stone fragments (006). This could only be studied in a small area, because the floor itself lies below the construction level and is retained *in situ*. Within the silty sand were fragments of china and porcelain that indicate a post 1780 date for construction, and seem to be of late 19<sup>th</sup> century character.
- 4.9 The floor covers an area 5m by 3m, and was oriented at right-angles to Smithick Hill, so clearly respected the line of the road. The most common material for the floor was rectangular flagstones 0.60m wide and 0.05m thick, made of sandstone. The second most frequent floor covering was mortar that overlay patches of bedrock. This mortar is unlikely to have been the finished surface, and must therefore have been the bedding for lost materials: either further flags or tiles. Granite cobbles were also used within this floor, accounting for most of the rest of the materials. These cobbles varied in size from 0.20m square to 0.08m, which were little more than granite pebbles. Each of the cobbles was rounded. Red bricks and half-bricks made up the rest of the floor, giving an impression of a very piecemeal construction. Possibly, this is all evidence of gradual repair to a well-used and well-worn surface. There did not appear to be any regularity to the areas of repair, apart from two lines of flagstones, one running roughly east-west, the other north-south.

### **Brick Building**

- 4.10 Also present upon the lowest terrace, to the north of the site, were the remnants of the building that most recently stood on the site. The only surviving element of the building following its demolition was a single course of brick (010). The bricks were laid with the stretchers visible, and bonded with hard, coarse cementitious mortar. To the west, the foundation lay directly next to the earlier stone structure, sitting entirely within its bounds. The eastern limit of the property was not located, probably having been removed during a phase of clearance following demolition. At no point was a double thickness of bricks seen: this seems rather unlikely, since a minimum of a brick's length is more usual. Possibly, initial clearance was comprehensive enough to remove much of the lowest course.
- 4.11 Personal communication from the developer, indicated that the lost building had been a bookmakers, possibly previously a drapers. It was recalled that the



building had a wooden floor. Since there was no in-situ evidence of a wooden floor, its precise height is unknown. However, a drain ran diagonally across the floor of the previous phase, concreted above the slabs and cobbles. Since the drain is unlikely to have been a prominent feature of the flooring: a trip hazard as well as unsightly, it is surmised that this drain was added when the associated building was rebuilt or modified.

- 4.12 The entirety of the lower part of site was covered by demolition debris relating to the building or buildings that most recently stood until burnt down in the late 1960s (003). The building debris contained red bricks typically 232mm by 110mm by 71mm, and associated mortar that had a high cement content: these were of the same type as formed the brick foundation (010). There was also grey roofing slate, plaster, burnt timber elements, largely too damaged to determine which parts of the building they may related to, and window glass. There had been some disturbance or reworking of this deposit: it was mixed with a general background soil that was dark brown silty sand. The fact that this deposit was generally across the whole of the lower part of the site indicates that the building remains were levelled following demolition.

### **Steps**

- 4.13 A set of stairs that lead down from the upper terrace of the site before terminating near the steep quarry face were also recorded on the site, and were the primary point of interest at the beginning of the project. The steps were constructed of smooth slabs of local stone, and each step's riser was between 0.18m and 0.33m, resulting in a very irregular flight (002).
- 4.14 The steps run roughly west for eight treads, before gradually turning northwards and finishing suddenly above the cut quarry edge. They lie in a channel cut into the cliff-edge, and the majority of this channel is lined with thin slabs of local stone set on edge with no bonding material evident. The stone itself is somewhat weathered. The steps were slightly obscured by accumulated silty sand that contained occasional fragments of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century pottery.
- 4.15 The top step is at 18.41mOD, and the bottom step is at 14.49mOD. The flight's lowest step is almost directly above the southwest corner of the Stone Wall recorded in the face of the quarry, and strongly indicates a probable direct relationship.

### **Finds**

- 4.16 Finds were collected from the deposit underlying the flagstone floor and from the accumulated soil of the stone steps. Pottery was the only find category collected, and was typically blue and white or undecorated porcelain, indicating a probable late 19<sup>th</sup> century date. The finds will contribute little to the understanding of the site.

## 5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

- 5.1 The four structures revealed during this Watching Brief and Historic Building Record all serve to illuminate the development of this part of Falmouth, but conclusions are limited by a lack of dating material that is caused by the preservation *in situ* of all structures beneath the new development.
- 5.2 The earliest event on the site is the quarrying of the cliff, forming a steep face and a platform suitable for building. The former, unquarried topography cannot be determined with any accuracy, but if Smithick Hill marks the former route to Arwenack, then the base of the original slope is likely to have been roughly on the line of Smithick Hill today.
- 5.3 The oldest of the structures is likely to be the stone wall that nestles in the shadow of the quarry. The height of the surviving wall is sufficient to show the cavities where joists may have lain, but no evidence was forthcoming. Possibly, then, either this was a high-ceilinged building, or more simply, there were joists oriented north-south, in which case the evidence would not be present.
- 5.4 An 'old' meeting house was referred to on Porhan Hill – now Smithick Hill – in 1744, so it is possible that this wall, surviving to 2.98m high represents this Meeting House which could, conceivably have had high ceilings. If it is considered that the building which this wall represents filled much of the area of the site, then the stone floor may directly relate to the wall. The use of disparate and different materials in the floor may therefore be evidence of a long-lasting building that was subject to periods of repair. It may also be considered that the flagged area represent excessively worn patches of the floor, perhaps indicating that they mark main circulation zones.
- 5.5 It is also recorded that and this street was also the site of a small house set up in 1766 for 'harbouring sick seamen and other poor patients, which is better than to have them in the town'. Such a house may not have been built of the newest materials, and this could explain the varied nature of the materials of the floor. However, the pottery collected from beneath the floor indicates a 19<sup>th</sup> century date, so it is difficult to ascribe the floor to either of the known buildings.
- 5.6 It has been noted that reuse of large buildings occurred over much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the historian Susan Gay observed in 1903 that many former 'quality corner' houses in Porhan Hill, Church Street, Arwenack Street and New Street 'have become tenement houses or shops'. Personal communication from the developer indicated that the lost building had been a bookmakers, possibly previously a drapers.
- 5.7 However, the most recent building on the site had a red-brick foundation bonded with cementitious mortar, and had a suspended wooden floor above the earlier stone floor. The location of the brick foundation within the footprint of the stone building may be evidence for a re-use of a property boundary. The use of cement within the mortar would indicate a late 19<sup>th</sup> century or more

recent date. This is the foundation that is all that remains of the building or buildings burned down in the 1960s.

- 5.8 The steps at the top of the quarry that lead down into it (or up away from it) are of slightly enigmatic function. It seems unlikely that they pre-date the quarry, so must therefore relate to one of the buildings on the site. Their position almost directly above the southwest corner of the building with the Stone Wall suggests that they may have led to an upper storey of this building, but since the later brick building also lay within the same area, then the steps could equally be of more modern date.
- 5.9 Beyond those features recorded, the base of the quarry did not reveal any further archaeological material, being simply the bedrock. If there had been further surviving features, they may have been lost when the burned property at the foot of Smithick Hill was demolished and the site generally cleared.

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## PLATES



Plate 1: Across the Fal estuary from the top of the Quarry



Plate 2: The stone wall



Plate 3: The floor surface



Plate 4: The stone steps

**APPENDIX A – CONTEXT REGISTER**

<b>Context Number</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Length/m</b>	<b>Width/m</b>	<b>Depth/m</b>	<b>Finds</b>
001	Accumulated sandy silt	F.002	F.002	0.32	Pottery
002	Set of Stairs	6.00	0.82m	3.5m	
003	Demolition deposit	Site	Site	2.00	
004	Floor surface	5.00	3.00	0.25	
005	Stone wall	11.32	0.60	2.98	
006	Bedding layer for 004	5.00	3.00	0.05	Pottery
007	Granite Bedrock	Site	Site	>4.00	
008	Cut/ fault containing 004	5.00	3.00	0.30	
009	Quarry Cut	12.05	>2.00	>4.00	
010	Brick Foundation	11.00	9.00	0.08	