

Devon County Council Historic Environment Record

Civil Parish & District: Bere Alston, West Devon	National Grid Reference SX 43247 65000	Number:
Subject: Archaeological monitoring and recording on land adjacent to Weir Cottage		Photo attached? YES
Planning Application no: 0408/16/HHO	Recipient museum: Plymouth City Museum	
OASIS ID: Southwes1-262965	Museum Accession no: N/A	
Contractor's reference number/code: WQC16	Dates fieldwork undertaken: 21 st & 26 th September 2016	

Description of works.

Archaeological monitoring and recording was undertaken by South West Archaeology Ltd. (SWARCH) at the request of Mike Nye of James Lockyer Associates Ltd during groundworks associated with the removal and replacement of a collapsed retaining wall on land adjacent to Cobblestone Cottage, Weir Quay, Bere Alston, Devon. The monitoring was carried out by S. Walls during two visits on 21st and 26th August 2016.

The proposal is located in an area of archaeological potential relating to the industrial heritage of the Tamar Valley AONB and the Cornwall & West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site. The land is recorded as two areas of gardens bisected by a road/track in 1842. The site is in close proximity to a number of sites of industrial heritage significance, and the plot contains at its eastern end a 19th century limekiln (shown on the tithe map). Notably the Tamar Lead and Silver Smelter complex (of which Cobblestone Cottage was once a part) is located immediately to the east (Buck 2008 and 2012). It is possible that the proposed groundworks for the wall foundations will expose archaeological evidence such as former historic surfaces, industrial products and waste materials (e.g. metalliferous ores, lime/limestone, slags, etc.).

Weir Quay is located to the south-west of Bere Alston, fronting onto the River Tamar. The site sits on level ground at a height of approximately 4m (AOD), with the ground rising to the east. The soils of the area are the well-drained fine loamy soils of Denbigh 1 Association (SSEW 1983) overlying slates of the Tavy Formation (BGS 2016).

The groundworks comprised the removal of the collapsed rubble of the wall, and some of the standing fabric to stabilise the remaining structure. The material behind the collapsed section of wall was scarped back slightly, and a sondage excavated through the wall footings to ascertain their depth, etc (see Figures 1-2).

The retaining wall that had collapsed consisted primarily of a 20th century re-build of an historic structure. The footings of the historic (19th century?) wall survived beneath the collapse (see Figure 4). The historic wall appeared to be c.2.9m high, and consisted of three distinct phases of build in the surviving fabric to the west. The excavation of the sondage through the footing revealed that this extended c.1m in depth, with the ground within the proposal site having been raised by around 0.5-0.6m. The lower portion of wall (c.1.3m above present ground level; 2.3m in total) was of tightly packed and roughly coursed blocky stone with a very hard and clean white lime mortar with rare coal fragments. The clean nature of the lime bond perhaps indicative that it hadn't travelled very far, i.e. from the nearby lime kiln.

The original wall had then been raised by c.1.3m, presumably at a similar time as the ground level was raised within the proposal site. This raise was less well coursed and in general contained small more platy and widely spaced stone. The bond was of a creamy white lime mortar, with a patchy reddish-brown silt-clay bond with some lime in the core of the build. This raised wall had a series of regular c.1m wide openings (three surviving), spaced evenly apart every 0.8m. These openings had subsequently been infilled, mostly in coursed stone with a cement bond, but with occasional bricks and brick fragments. It was noted within the visible section of the bank behind the wall, that the traces of a further two openings existed.

The stratigraphy behind the wall comprised of a series of layers ((100), (101), (102), (103), (104)) of rubble infill, rubbish and dark brown friable silts with heavy root intrusions c.1.4m thick, which had been backfilled up against the wall, probably in the 20th century. Infilling behind the raised wall, perhaps during garden landscaping for the property to the north, ultimately contributed to its collapse. These layers contained plant pot fragments, common bricks, industrial slipwares, the remains of an iron bucket and a few roof slates. Below layer (104) was a layer of relatively clean greyish-yellow friable silt-clay with occasional stones (105), this appears to have been cut into by two features [106] and [108]. These cuts represent traces of the subsequently infilled chutes/vents in the wall. Feature [106] was the more obvious of the two features, as it had a thin layer of coal surviving at the base of the cut, and had

been packed with some stone, presumably at the point of infilling. Cut [108] was barely visible, and was largely demonstrated by the clear straight join apparent in the standing structure; this was subsequently removed due to the possibility of further collapse, as apparent in Figure 4.

Below deposit (105) were two further layers of an earlier backfill behind the retaining wall, (112) was comprised of a clean grey-brown silt-clay with common small stone (shillet) fragments, which appeared to abut(?) a deposit (111) of similar matrix but with abundant large and small shillet fragments. These backfill deposits overlay clean mid-brown silty clay (topsoil), which had accumulated behind the wall prior to the deliberate backfill represented by deposits (111) and (112). During the subsequent scarping back of the bank, it was noted that the natural rock face was set further back from the wall in the vicinity of deposit (111), which perhaps necessitated the more substantial backfill behind this part of the wall.

The former existence of a trackway which bisected the approximate location of the wall on the tithe map (see Figure 3) was not apparent in the exposed or scarped back section. The exact location was not identified in the scarped back section, which may suggest that it was located slightly further to the east than the collapse, perhaps obscured by the un-collapsed section of bank. The increasing thickness of deposit (105) may suggest that this relatively clean material had been used to backfill the track in the 19th century, and would suggest that the wall postdates 1840, although was in existence prior to the 1st edition map. It would appear likely that it was built following the demolition of the 'house' at the western end of the plot.

In the sondage excavated to expose the footings of the wall, the stratigraphy revealed that the upper 0.5-0.6m were comprised of a modern topsoil deposit (113) and a layer of greyish-brown silt-clay with common stones and occasional brick fragments (114), this overlay a thin (c.0.03m thick) layer of coal (115). Below the thin layer of coal was cut [116] for the 19th century wall was visible. The cut was c.0.5m deep and 1.5m wide and had steep sloping sides and a flat base; it was filled by a grey silt-clay (117) with common shillet fragments. The wall cut had cut through a c.0.35m thick deposit of mid-brown silt-clay with occasional shillet inclusions, and into the natural below. No historic surfaces were evident in this small sondage, although the thin layer of coal suggests a former use for the area, and presumably chutes in the wall.

Finds
The assemblage was dominated by 19th-20th century finds, including white refined earthenwares (11 sherds, 165g), coal (1 sherd, 6g), terracotta flowerpot, an iron bucket, and other modern rubbish. The majority of material was unstratified and recovered from the spoil of the machine scarping the bank behind the wall, but probably derived from deposits (100), (101), (102), (103) and (104). Fragments of bricks, roof slates and coal were noted within several deposits, but were not recovered.

A full list of the finds recovered is held in the site archive. All finds were either discarded or left with the owners.

Conclusions
The features identified during the monitoring relate solely to the construction and enlargement of the retaining wall. The finds suggest that the layers retained behind the wall are predominantly comprised of 19th and 20th century deposits.

It is apparent from visiting the site, and following a tour of the immediate surroundings by the owner of Cobblestone Cottage that the extent of surviving features associated with the industrial and mining heritage of the area is much greater than is currently understood (e.g. the partial remains of a possible lead/silver smelter survive in the garden wall of Cobblestone Cottage). The majority of work in the area has been conducted in association with redevelopment works (e.g. Buck 2008, 2012), and while this has laid an excellent foundation a more detailed assessment and recording exercise of the upstanding buildings, walls, leats, etc. would probably be a worthwhile exercise.

References
Buck, C. 2008: *Weir Quay Smelters, Devon: Impact and Conservation Assessment*. Cornwall Historic Environment Service Report No. 2008R137
Buck, C. 2012: *Union Smelting Works, Weir Quay, Devon: Archaeological recording 2009-2010*. Cornwall Historic Environment Service Report No. 2012R044
Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983: *Legend for the 1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales (a brief explanation of the constituent soil associations)*.
British Geological Survey 2014: *Geology of Britain Viewer*. http://maps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyviewer_google/googleviewer.html [accessed 25.08.2015]

Recorder: S. Walls

Date sent to HER: 18/10/2016

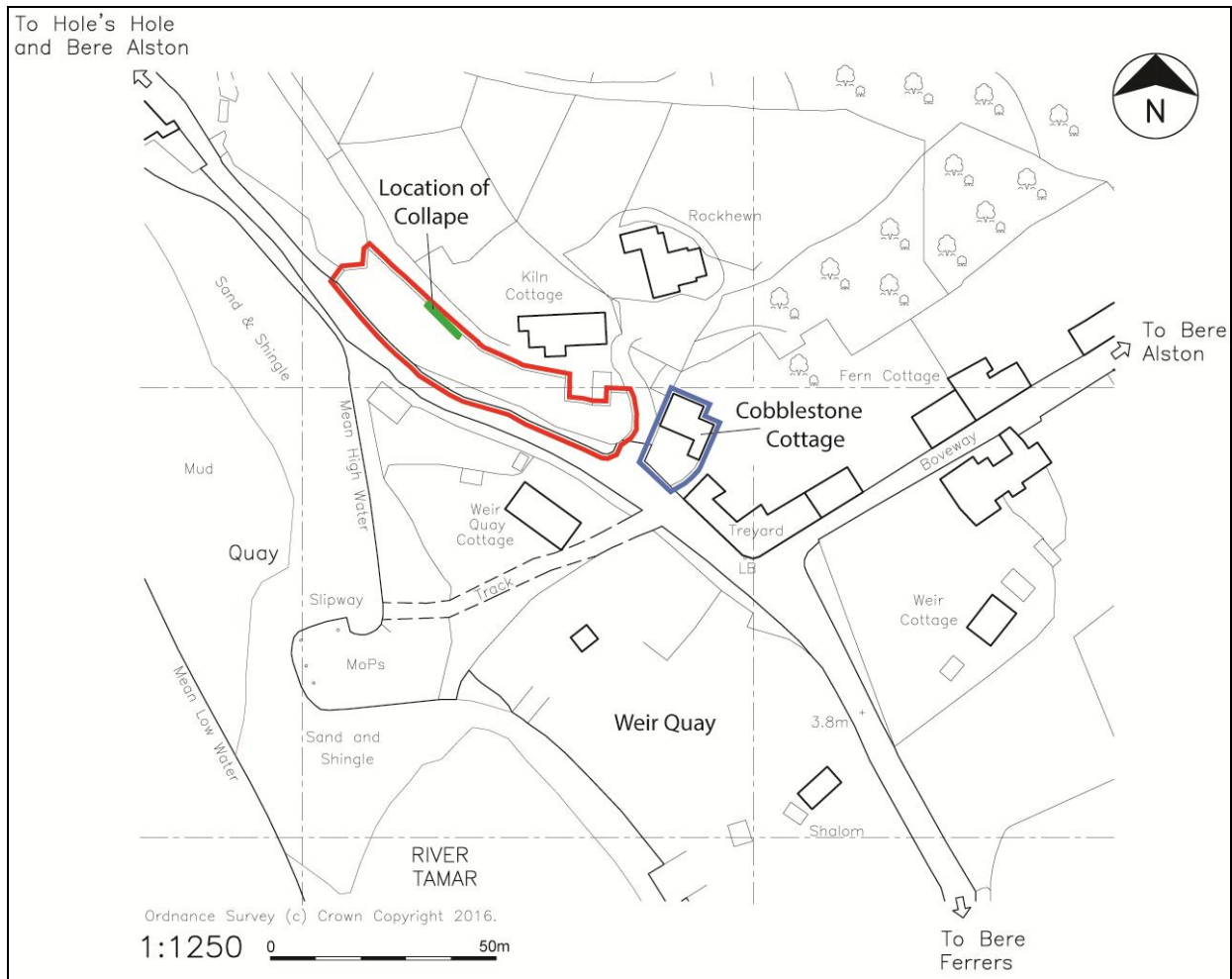


Figure 1: Site location and plan showing the location of the site bounded in red, and area of works in Green.

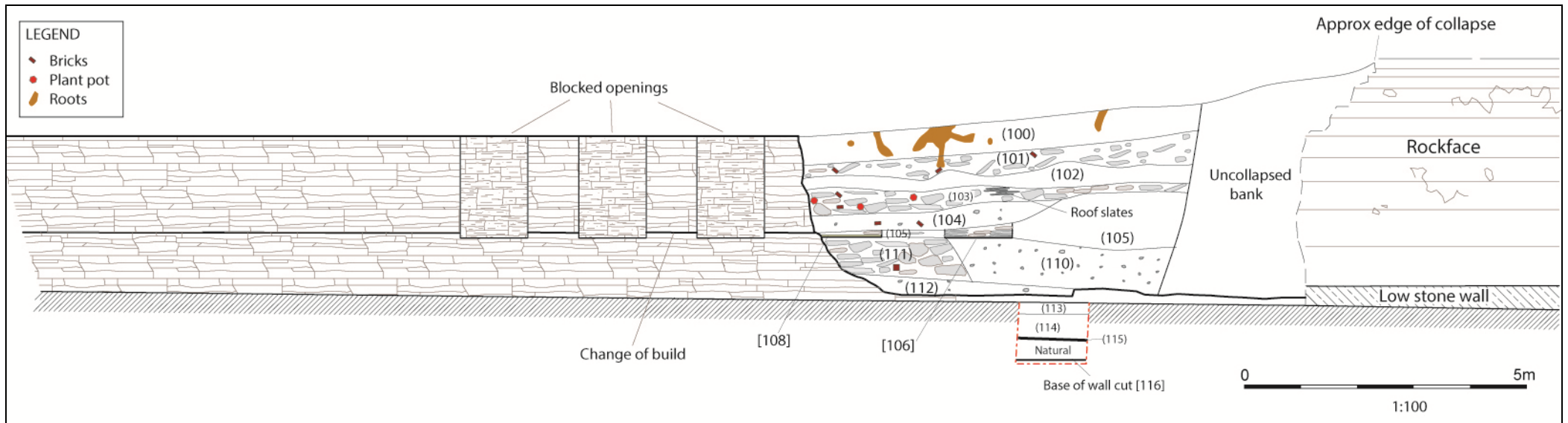


Figure 2: Elevation/section showing the wall and deposits exposed behind, prior to grading.

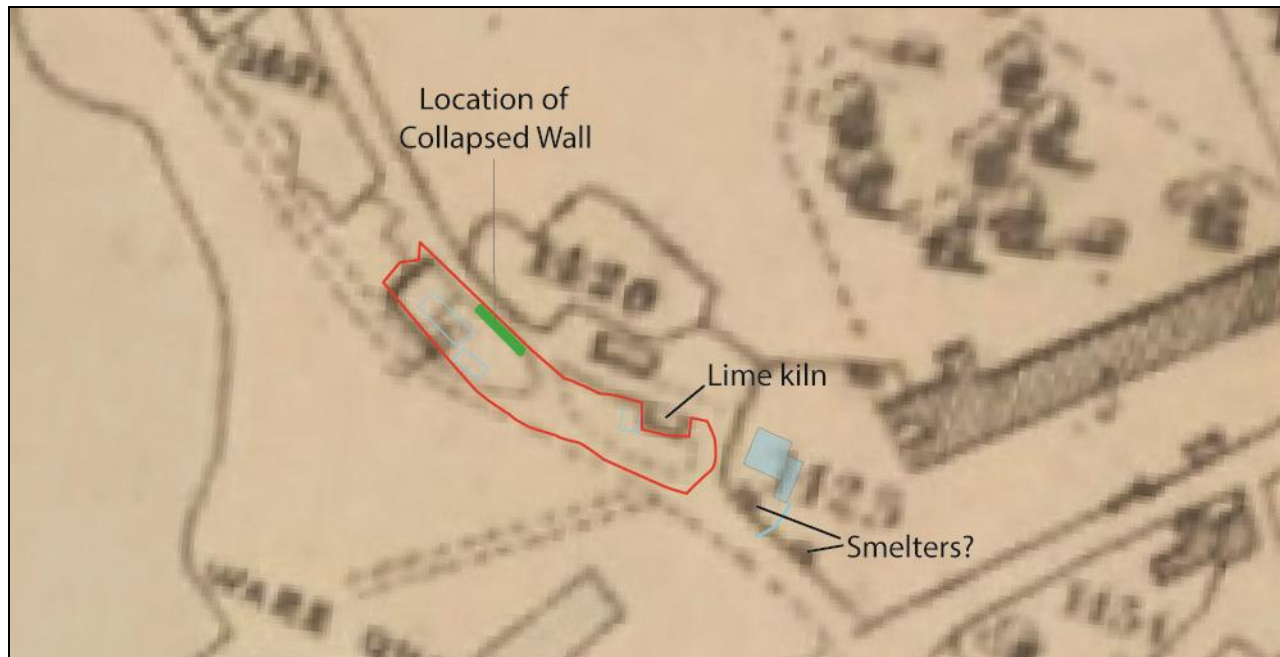


Figure 3: Extract of the Bere Alston Tithe Map, the approximate location of the site is bounded in red, with the present sheds and Cobblestone Cottage shown in blue.



Figure 4: Shot of historic wall footing (scale 2m). Note the lean on the remaining historic wall, the upper corner was removed prior to the rebuilding.