

# **Management of prehistoric monuments on Helvear Down, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly**

## **Archaeological monitoring**



**Katharine Sawyer**

**Report No: 2011/04**



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**June 2011**

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## **Acknowledgements**

The fieldwork was carried out and the report written by Katharine Sawyer.

Advice was provided by Eleanor Breen, Assistant Planning Officer (Conservation), Council of the Isles of Scilly, David Mawer, Senior Conservation Warden, the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust and Charlie Johns, Senior Archaeologist, Historic Environment Projects, Cornwall Council.

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

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## **Abbreviations**

EH	English Heritage
HER	Cornwall and Scilly Historic Environment Record
HES	Historic Environment Service, Cornwall Council
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
NGR	National Grid Reference
NMR	National Monuments Record
OS	Ordnance Survey
PRN	Primary Record Number in Cornwall and Scilly HER
SM	Scheduled Monument

## **1. Summary**

This report describes the archaeological monitoring carried out by Katharine Sawyer during and after management work on Helvear Down, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly (NGR SV 922 123). Two scheduled monuments, a round cairn (SM 15376) and a kerbed platform cairn (SM 15377), which are both on English Heritage's Scheduled Monuments at Risk Register, were cleared of vegetation and fallen trees by contractors employed by the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust, under their Higher Level Stewardship Agreement.

Part of the chamber of the kerbed platform cairn was exposed during these works and was recorded by photographs and by plan and section drawings. The round cairn was photographed as were two other structures uncovered during the works.

A number of recommendations have been made as a result of this work.

## **2. Introduction**

### **2.1 Project background**

The Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust has entered into a Higher Level Stewardship Agreement with DEFRA. As part of this, management work was undertaken on Helvear Down, St Mary's. There are two scheduled sites in this area: a round cairn (SM 15376, PRN 7470) and a kerbed platform cairn (SM 15377, PRN 7458). These are located within a shelter belt of trees, planted early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several of which were blown over in storms in 1989.

The monuments were at risk of damage due to tree throws and fallen tree limbs and were both included in English Heritage's Scheduled Monuments at Risk Register. The management work was carried out in January 2011 under archaeological supervision.

Due to the absence from work of the Historic Environment Field Adviser for the Isles of Scilly and the tight timescale for the use of the funding for this project, the archaeological monitoring was carried out with the guidance of a project outline only (see appendix 8.1).

### **2.2 Objectives**

The objectives of the project, as set out in the project outline, were:

- to clear fallen trees and remove unstable, over-mature trees
- to record any exposed archaeological deposits
- to protect the monuments from further damage due to weathering.

### **2.3 Methods**

#### **2.3.1 Desk-based assessment**

Prior to the management work, desk research was carried out to obtain information about the history of the site. The main sources consulted were as follows:

- Cornwall and Scilly HER
- Scheduled monument records
- Historical maps of St Mary's.

#### **2.3.2 Field work**

The management work consisted of the removal of invasive vegetation and fallen tree limbs and the clearance of tree stumps by contractors employed by the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust. Close liaison was maintained with the contractors to ensure that all stages of their work were



monitored. Photographic recording was carried out during and after vegetation clearance. Exposed archaeological features were recorded by photograph and by plan and section drawings.

## **2.4 Site location**

Helvear Down is located on the north coast of St Mary's, as shown in the location maps at appendix 8.6. The two scheduled monuments are at the eastern end of the Down at Helvear Hill. The kerbed platform cairn (at grid reference SV 92315 12380) is close to the steep scarp down to the coast, at an altitude of approximately 22m, whilst the round cairn (grid reference SV 92250 12332) is about 80m further inland to the south-west at an altitude of about 29m.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1 Desk-based assessment**

The earliest reference to the prehistoric monuments on Helvear Hill is by Troutbeck (c1796), who mentions a barrow about 100 yards from the post-mediaeval battery on the hilltop; this probably refers to the kerbed platform cairn. Layard says that "Two ... [barrows] were demolished about 30 years ago when breaking ground for pasture at Helvear (1933:133). This would indicate that the demolition took place at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> or beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The First and Second Edition OS maps were examined; on the 1890 1:2,500 map, included at appendix 8.7.1, the battery is shown, but not the barrows. The coastal area, as far inland as the buildings at Helvear, is shown as rough ground. The 1906 1:2,500 map, included at 8.7.2, is almost identical. On the 1963 1:10,650 revision, shown at 8.7.3, the agricultural nature of the area is apparent with its small fields. A narrow shelter belt of trees is shown running parallel with the coast and then turning at right angles close to the battery to continue inland; again the barrows are not shown. The kerbed cairn appears, for the first time on the 1980 1:10,000 map, shown at 8.7.4, where it is marked as "Chambered Cairn". The number of field boundaries has reduced from the 1963 map, perhaps reflecting the decline in flower farming over this period.

The round cairn appears to have been recognised for the first time by Russell and is included in her survey simply as a "Large mound" (1980:33). The grid reference she gives does not match exactly that recorded for the round cairn but it seems likely that it is the site noted by her.

The area is mapped as "rocky coast with heathland" (Land Use Consultants, 2002).

## **3.2 Fieldwork**

Fieldwork commenced on 21 December 2010 when photographic recording took place during vegetation clearance. The two scheduled monuments were both recorded together with a possible structure, at SV 92295 12366, a few metres to the south-west of the kerbed platform cairn. Another possible structure exposed by a tree throw further to the south-west, at 92271 12346, was also photographed.

A grouping of boulders inside the Civil War battery (SM 15378, PRN 7457) was also photographed. This is outside the project area but may represent the remains of a ruined chambered cairn. On 22 December 2010 vegetation clearance was completed and the kerbed platform cairn and the structure adjacent to it were photographed again.

The round cairn is shown before and after removal of dead branches in appendix 8.9.1 and the kerbed platform cairn before and after vegetation clearance in 8.9.2. The structure close to the platform cairn is shown in 8.9.3 and 8.9.4 and that further to the south-west at 8.9.5, both after clearance. The boulders within the Civil War battery are shown at 8.9.6.

The sites were visited again on 24 and 26 January and on 17 and 24 March 2011 for plan and section drawing and recording. No archaeological contexts were identified, only a dark-brown, peaty soil at all the sites.

The locations of the four sites within the project area are shown on the map at 8.6.3.

The following details were noted:

### **3.2.1 Round cairn (SM 15376, PRN 7470, SV 92250 12332)**

This roughly circular mound is located against a stone wall which appears to have truncated it on its south-western side. There is no trace of the mound on the other side of the wall. There is a large pine tree on the southern side of the mound, close to the wall, as shown in 8.5.1. The dead branches of this were removed as part of the vegetation clearance and the tree is now believed to be stable and secure.

A single stone, measuring 0.55m by 0.45m by 0.3m, lies on the eastern edge of the mound and there are depressions around the perimeter on the eastern and south-eastern sides, caused either by tree throws or excavation. No trace of a kerb was found by probing and there were no finds.

During the course of this project a small conifer was planted on the north-eastern slope of the mound; this is believed to have been done by the farmer of the neighbouring farm.

### **3.2.2 Kerbed platform cairn (SM 15377, PRN 7458, SV 92305 12376)**

This structure is recorded as an entrance grave in the HER and conforms to the usual layout of this site type in Scilly. Its damaged state suggests that it is likely to be one of the two barrows described by Layard (1933). The remains of a chamber survive roughly in the centre of the cairn, with one stone forming the end and three surviving on the northern side. The chamber is oriented north-east to south-west, with the entrance at the north-east end.

A large stone with a natural basin in its upper surface, probably a capstone, is propped up on one edge to the south-west of the endstone and another possible capstone lies across the northern chamber wall. The chamber measures approximately 3.6m in length, 1.5m in width and is currently 0.3m high, although there is accumulated dead vegetation and peat in the base of the chamber which was not removed.

Other small stones survive to the south of the endstone and to the east and west of the presumed entrance. The original mound appears to survive on the north-western side of the monument and two stones, probably kerbstones, were found by probing on the edge of the mound. Elsewhere the outline of the mound is not clear because of dead vegetation and stacks of wood.

No finds were made during the removal of loose vegetation in and around the chamber. It was drawn in plan and section at 1:20 and the chamber and mound were drawn in plan at 1:40. These are shown at appendix 8.8.

### **3.2.3 Possible entrance grave (?PRN 7459, SV 92295 12366)**

This site is located about 10m to the south-west of the entrance grave described above and is probably the second barrow described by Layard (1933), which has not been satisfactorily identified to date. This site has been further damaged by the toppling of a large tree which had been planted directly over it.

The root plate has not been removed and a large stone, probably a capstone, can be seen on the upper (southern) side of the roots; this is illustrated at 8.9.4. Immediately to the north of the root plate is the roughly circular depression of the tree throw, where a number of small stones can be seen to form an arc, illustrated at 8.9.3. Further stones are apparent in the base of the root plate.

No finds were made in the area of this site and it was recorded by photography only as its layout and disturbed nature did not permit plan or section drawing.

### **3.2.4 Possible structure (SV 92271 12346)**

This site is also located in a tree throw where the root plate has not been removed. A large stone is visible just to the south of the tree throw hollow and there are several other smaller stones, both in the base of the root plate and in the centre of the hollow below.

Again there were no finds and the site was recorded by photography only.

## **4. Conclusion**

This project has allowed a much more detailed archaeological recording of the kerbed platform cairn (SM 15377) than has previously been possible and has also permitted the recognition and initial recording of two other possible structures in the project area.

Part of the stone walling of the chamber in the kerbed platform cairn has now been revealed, together with two probable capstones. Two kerbstones were also found by probing. The surviving remains are typical of a Scillonian entrance grave.

The remaining root plates make it difficult to ascertain the detailed nature of the two previously unrecorded sites although the presence of a probable capstone at the site adjacent to the kerbed platform cairn makes it likely that this one, at least, is an entrance grave. These two sites seem likely to be the two barrows referred to by Layard (1933) and their damaged condition is consistent with what he recorded.

As the map at 8.6.3 shows, all four sites in the project area lie in an approximately straight line on the ridge of the hill, a typical layout of entrance graves in Scilly. The group of boulders within the Civil War battery are on the same line, further to the north-east.

## **5. Recommendations**

1. That the HER entries for the kerbed platform cairn and round cairn be updated to include the results of this project.
2. That new HER entries be made for the two new structures found (PRN 7459 already refers to the second barrow mentioned by Layard, 1933).
3. That the small conifer planted on the round cairn during the course of this project be removed.
4. That the locations of other, newly-planted saplings in the project area be checked by staff of the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust and an archaeologist and any which are considered to be too close to archaeologically significant areas be removed.

## **6. Archive**

The project's documentary and photographic finds archive will be housed at the Isles of Scilly Museum, Church Street, St Mary's; the site code is HM10. The archive will be deposited by the end of August 2011.

The archive consists of:

- General notes and correspondence regarding the project
- The site notebook
- This report
- Photographic register
- Digital photographs
- Two plans and one section drawing.

## 7. References

### 7.1 Primary sources

Historic Environment Service, Cornwall County Council	Cornwall and Scilly Historic Environment Record
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Ordnance Survey, 1890	1:2500 (25 inch) First Edition map
Ordnance Survey, 1906	1:2500 (25 inch) Second Edition map
Ordnance Survey, 1963	1:10650 revision
Ordnance Survey, 1980	1:10000 map

Viewed online at [www.old-maps.co.uk](http://www.old-maps.co.uk)

### 7.2 Publications

Land Use Consultants, 1996	Isles of Scilly Historic Landscape Assessment and Management Strategy; unpublished
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Land Use Consultants, 2002	The Isles of Scilly: A Landscape Assessment of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; Cheltenham: Countryside Agency
----------------------------	---

Layard, J, 1933	The Prehistoric Heritage of Scilly, in <i>The Scillonian</i> , Vol VII, Issue 35, 119-35
-----------------	---

Russell, V, 1980	<i>Isles of Scilly Survey</i> : Isles of Scilly Museum and Institute of Cornish Studies
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Troutbeck, J, c1796	A Survey of the Ancient and Present State of the Scilly Islands; Sherborne
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## **8. Appendices**

### **8.1 Project outline**

#### **Project outline for management of prehistoric monuments on Helvear Down, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly**

##### **1 Introduction**

The Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust has entered into a Higher Level Stewardship Agreement. As part of this agreement management work is to be undertaken on two prehistoric monuments on Helvear Down, St Mary's.

The Scheduled Monuments at Risk Register for the Isles of Scilly (Arbery 2005) records two prehistoric ceremonial monuments at 'high risk' on Helvear Down, St Mary's. A round cairn (SM 15376) and a kerbed platform cairn (SM 15377) are located in a shelter belt of mature pines, many of which were blown over during storms in 1989. The resulting damage due to tree throws and fallen tree limbs threatens the upstanding monuments and sub-surface archaeology. The proposed project entails:

- clearance of fallen trees and removal of unstable, over-mature trees
- recording of exposed archaeological deposits
- protection from further damage due to weathering

Once the project aims have been achieved the monuments can be removed from English Heritage @Risk Register

##### **2 The monuments**

The round cairn (Scheduled Monument 15376, grid reference SV92241231) lies 137m east of Helvear Farm on the south-west edge of Helvear Hill. When visited by the English Heritage Field Monument Warden in 1993 the monument measured c.12.5m in diameter and survived to a height of c.1.0m. The western edge of the monument is crossed by a modern dry-stone wall which may have truncated part of the monument.

The kerbed platform cairn (Scheduled Monument 15377, grid reference SV92301236) lies 80m north-east of the round cairn on the north-east end of Helvear Hill. The monument occupies a position close to the steep scarp down to the sea. The site may be one recorded by Troutbeck in 1796. When visited by the English Heritage Field Monument Warden in 1993 the monument measured c.8m in diameter and c.0.4m in height. Four kerb stones were recorded along the north-west edge of the cairn and a chamber south-east of centre of the monument was manifest as a hollow (c.1.5m long x 1.0m wide x 0.5 m deep) with slabs visible on its north-west and south-west sides. A displaced capstone (2.1m x 1.8m x 0.5m) was noted on the south-west edge of the mound. In 1993 a struck flint flake was recovered from the root ball of a fallen tree on the kerbed platform cairn. This tree throw also exposed slabs that may represent the entrance to a chamber.



### **3 Condition of the monuments**

Both monuments have been compromised by tree throws and fallen tree limbs as a result of severe storms in 1989. Fallen trees and associated undergrowth (especially bracken and brambles) have masked the kerbed platform cairn and, to a lesser extent, the round cairn for 18 years and the damage to archaeological deposits associated with both monuments has not been evaluated during this period.

A tree throw on the western side of the kerbed platform cairn (SM 15377) may well have disturbed the cairn structure. In addition, a dead tree stump stands to the south west of the chamber area and the north side of the monument is covered in invasive vegetation and a stack of tree limbs. The kerbed platform cairn was also the subject of stone robbing in 1903 when nearby pasture was created.

In addition to the modern wall that traverses the round cairn (SM 15376) a large aging tree grows on the southern part of this monument. A tree fall would cause considerable damage to the cairn.

Parts of the shelter belt have been cleared of vegetation by the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust (IOSWT). A number of fallen tree limbs have been cut for firewood and are stacked around the site.

### **4 Management Proposal**

The Helvear Down monuments are identified as being at 'high risk' in the Scheduled Monuments at Risk Register for the Isles of Scilly (Arbery 2005). The pine trees in the shelter belt, probably planted in 1903, are now over-mature, thereby 'posing ... an active threat' to the archaeology (Scheduled Monument Record 15377). Arbery (2005, Appendix 1) recommends that the '[s]ite needs careful clearance in conjunction with [an] excavation and recording programme'. The proposed project seeks to achieve the clearance and recording that will allow the monuments to be removed from the Scheduled Monuments @ Risk Register.

### **5 List of tasks**

In order to protect buried archaeological deposits no heavy machinery should be used within the scheduled area.

- Careful removal of invasive vegetation and fallen tree limbs. Wherever appropriate log piles can be created to form habitat areas at the edge of the enclosure away from the scheduled areas
- Clearance (under archaeological supervision) of tree stumps and over-mature trees. Tree roots will be cut where necessary and will not be removed from below ground level.
- Assessment of damage to the monuments
- Hand cleaning and recording in both plan and section of areas exposed by tree throws

- The area of exposed ground will be turfed over using material from off-site and from a non-sensitive location.

In the event of the disturbance of significant archaeological deposits there is no contingency in place. However, following discussions with Joy Ede, the Natural England archaeologist it seems that Natural England may be willing to provide a contingency fund. No archaeologically intrusive work will begin on-site until satisfactory measures are in place.

## **6 Constraints**

Scilly's historic and natural environment is the subject of international, national and local designations that seek to protect, preserve and enhance the islands. Scheduled Monument Consent will be required for the works.

Scilly is designated *in toto* as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Helvear Down is also part of a Conservation Area and Heritage Coast. The AONB's Management Plan (2004-2009) describes a vision for the sustainable management of Scilly's unique environment. The proposed project will be carried out in consultation with officers of the AONB.

Helvear Down is owned by the Duchy of Cornwall from which permission to carry out the project will be sought.

## **7 The report and archive**

The project report will be structured as follows, though amendments and/or additions may be required according to the outcomes of the project.

Summary	
Introduction	Project background, objectives, methods, site location
Results	A concise description of the results
Conclusion	A concluding statement as to the significance of the results
Recommendations	Recommendations and a proposed programme for further work.
Archive	A brief summary and index to the project archive
Appendices	
	List of site contexts
	List of site drawings
	List of finds
	Illustrations
	Location map
	Copies of relevant historical cartography & plans
	Plan and section drawings resulting from the archaeological recording.
	Illustrative photographs

Copies of the project report will be lodged in relevant archives and circulated to project partners and other interested parties. The material archive will be deposited at The Isles of Scilly Museum.

## **8 Project Partners**

The vegetation clearance will be undertaken by the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust. The archaeological recording, supervision and reporting will be undertaken by the Council of the Isles of Scilly Conservation Officer with volunteer assistance.

## **9 Contacts**

*Name:* Dave Mawer, Senior Conservation Warden  
*Address:* Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, TR21 0PT  
*Tel no:* 05600 492909  
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*Name:* Eleanor Breen, Assistant Planning Officer (Conservation)  
*Address:* Council of the Isles of Scilly, Planning Department, The Old Wesleyan Chapel, Hugh Town, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, TR21 0JD  
*Tel no:* 01720 424351  
*E-mail:* [ebreen@scilly.gov.uk](mailto:ebreen@scilly.gov.uk)

## **10 Publicity and outreach**

The aims, methods and outcomes of the project will be made known to the public through local media and other means as appropriate. Volunteers from the local community will be welcomed onto the project for the vegetation clearance and the archaeological recording although the latter will only require one or two people due to the limits of the open area.

## **11 Health and safety statement**

The project will operate within the parameters of CIOS and Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust health and safety policies. A risk assessment will also be carried out prior to the fieldwork.

## **12 References**

Arbery, G 2005 *Scheduled Monuments at Risk. Isles of Scilly*.  
*Scheduled Monument Record 15376*, English Heritage, updated 27 June 2005.  
*Scheduled Monument Record 15377*, English Heritage, updated 27 June 2005.

## **8.2 List of site contexts**

No contexts were recorded.

## **8.3 List of site drawings**

1. Plan of chamber of kerbed platform cairn at 1:20
2. Plan of chamber and mound of kerbed platform cairn at 1:40 (shown at 8.8.1)
3. Section across chamber of kerbed platform cairn at 1:20 (shown at 8.8.2)

## **8.4 List of finds**

There were no finds resulting from this project.

## 8.5 Photographic Register

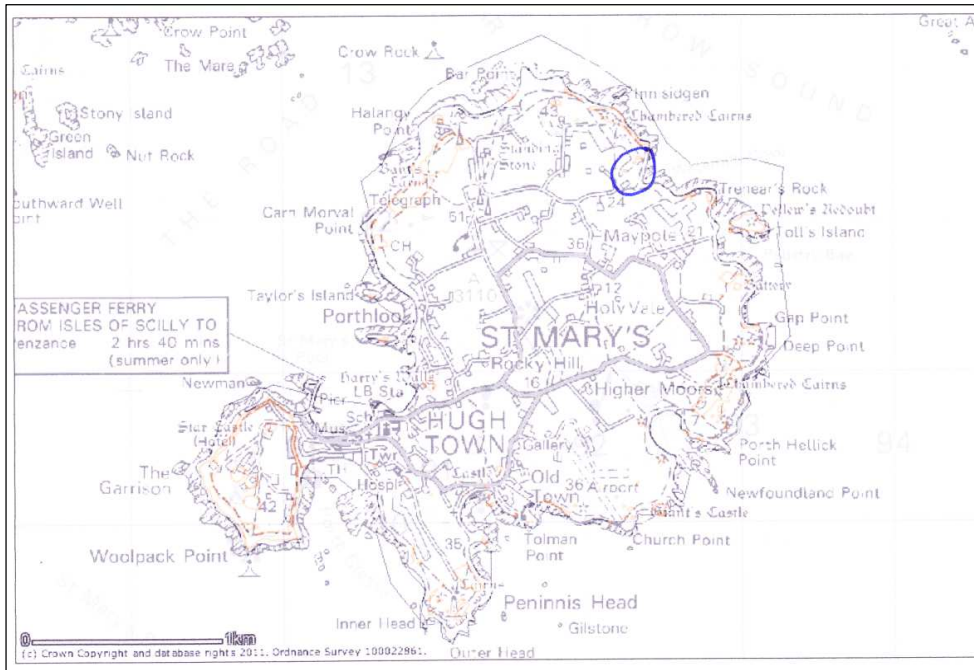
<b>Site Name:</b> Helvear SMs Monitoring			
<b>Digital photo no</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Direction</b>	<b>Initials and date</b>
1097	Site 2: SM 15377, PRN 7458, kerbed platform cairn	W	KS 21/12/10
1098	"	W	"
1099	"	W	"
1100	" , chamber	SW	"
1101	SM 15378, PRN 7457, possible chamber in battery	W	"
1102	"	W	"
1103	"	NW	"
1104	"	E	"
1105	"	S	"
1106	Site 3: ?PRN 7459, c10m to W of site 2	W	"
1107	"	N	"
1108	"	S	"
1109	Site 4: unrecorded, between 15376 and 15377, exposed by tree throw	SE	"
1110	"	S	"
1111	Site 1: SM 15376, PRN 7470, round cairn	W	"
1112	"	W	"
1113	"	NW	
1114	"	W	
1115	"	E	
1116	Site 2	SW	KS 22/12/10
1117	"	NW	"
1118	"	S	"
1119	Site 3	E	"
1120	"	E	"
1121	"	S	"
1164	Site 1, showing pine sapling	SW	KS 26/1/11
1165	Site 3: S side of tree stump	N	"
1166	"	N	"
1167	"	N	"

Digital photo no	Description	Direction	Initials and date
1168	Site 4	N	KS 26/1/11
1169	"	SE	"
1170	Site 2	W	"
1171	"	W	"
1172	"	SW	"
1173	Site 3, N side of tree stump	N	"
1174	"	E	"
1175	"	S	"
1176	"	E	"
1177	"	W	"

## 8.6 Location maps

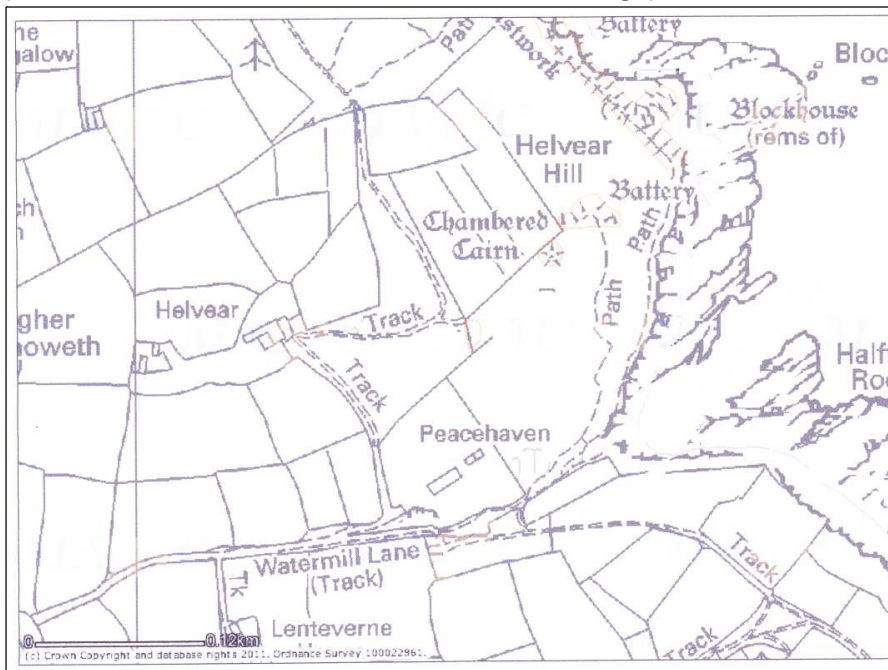
### 8.6.1 Map of St Mary's

(Site circled in blue, Scheduled Ancient Monuments outlined in orange)



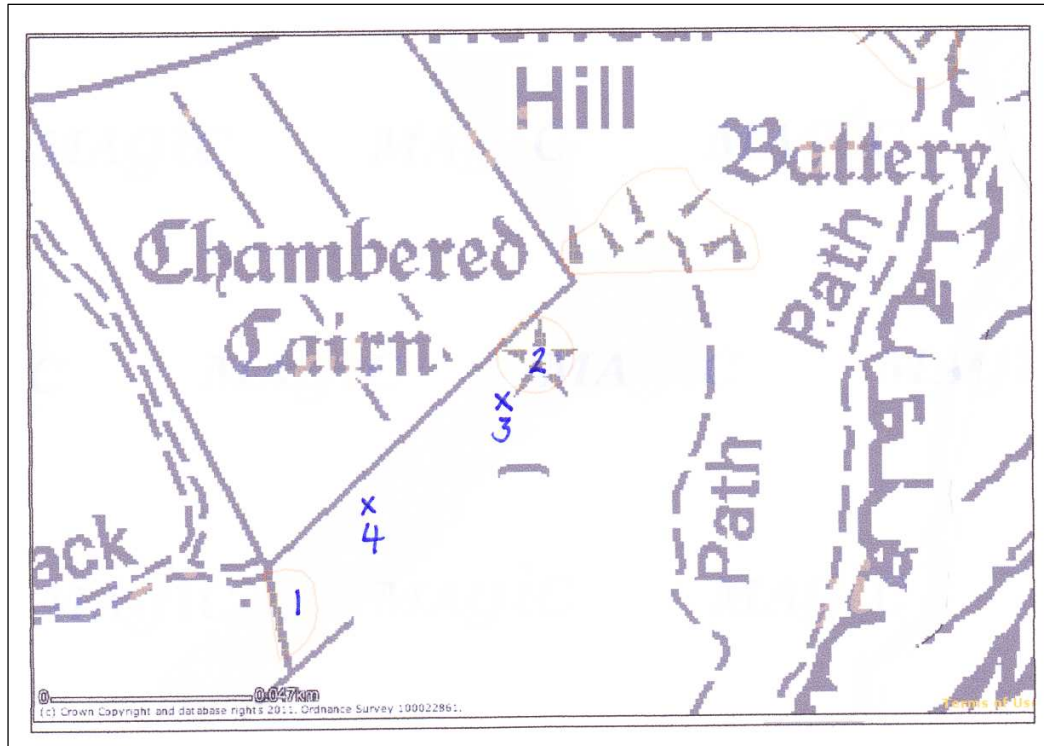
### 8.6.2 Map of Helvear Down

(Scheduled Ancient Monuments outlined in orange)



### 8.6.3 Map of project area showing locations of identified sites

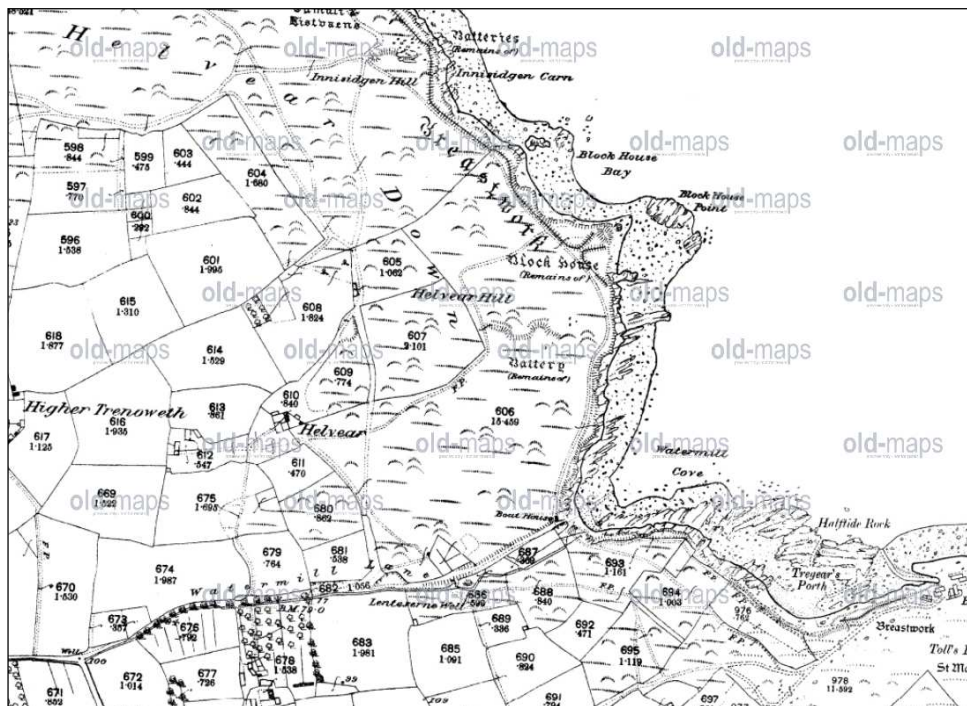
(1 – round cairn, 2 – kerbed platform cairn, 3 – possible entrance grave, 4 – possible structure)



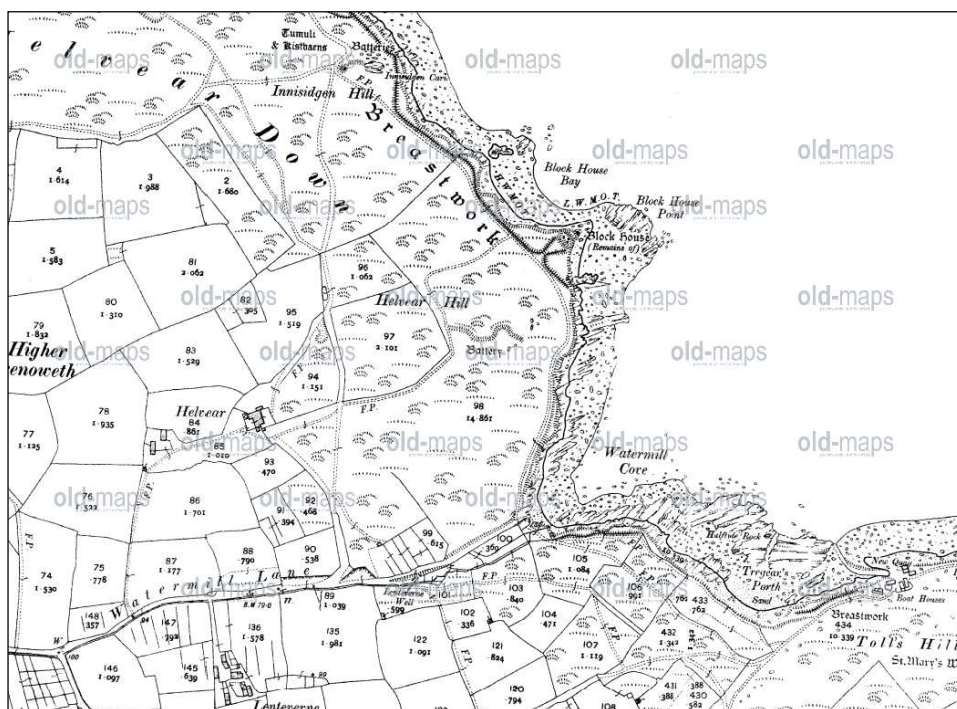


## 8.7 Copies of relevant historic cartography and plans

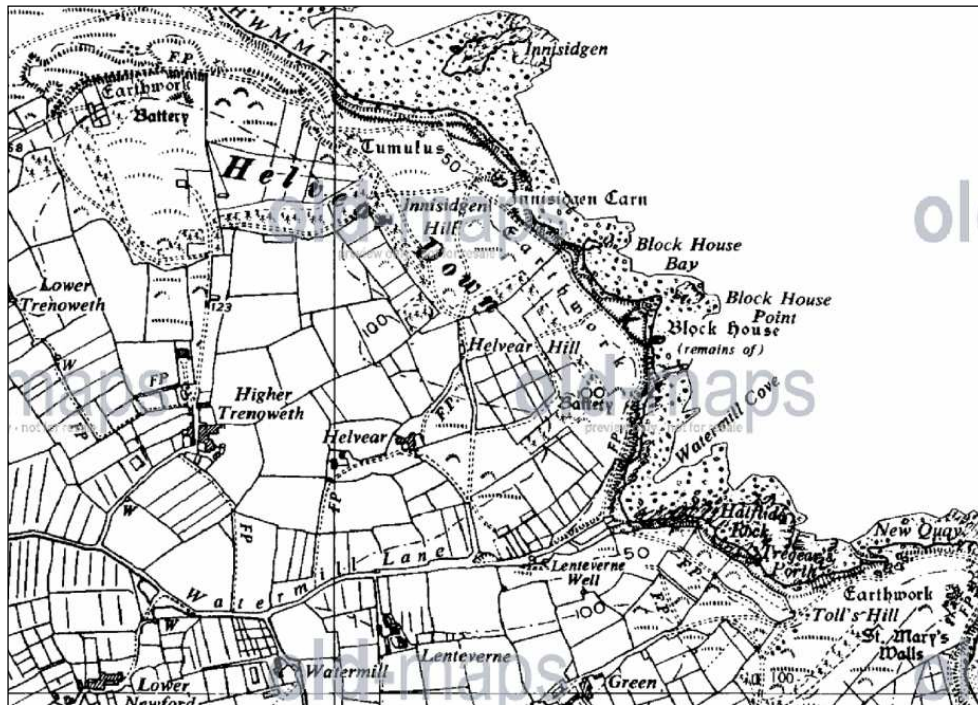
### 8.7.1 Extract from OS 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1:2500 map, 1890



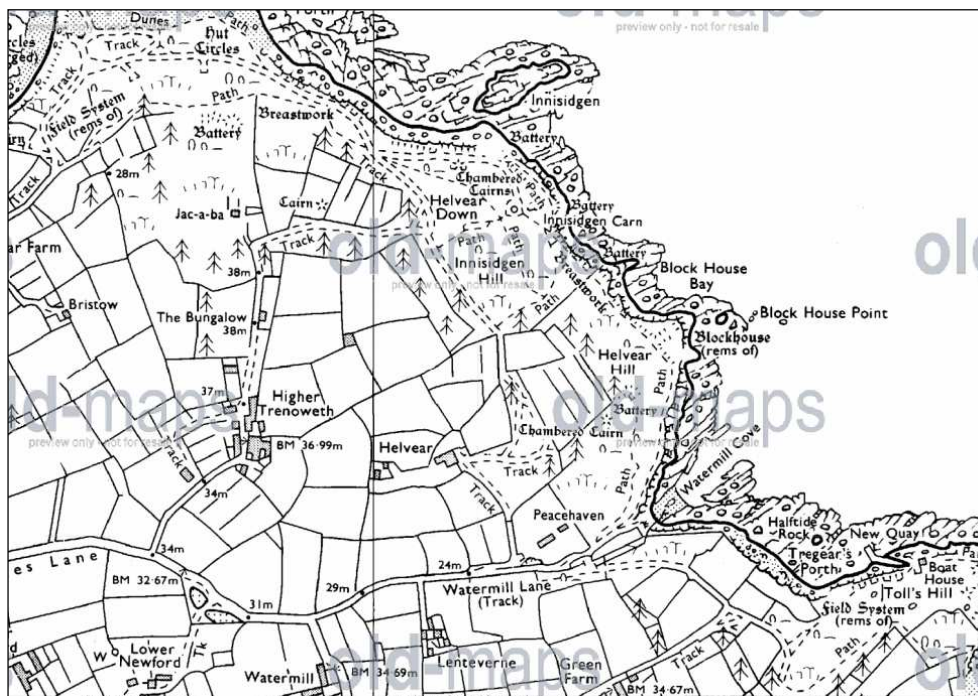
### 8.7.2 Extract from OS 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1:2500 map, 1906



### 8.7.3 Extract from OS 1:10650 revision, 1963



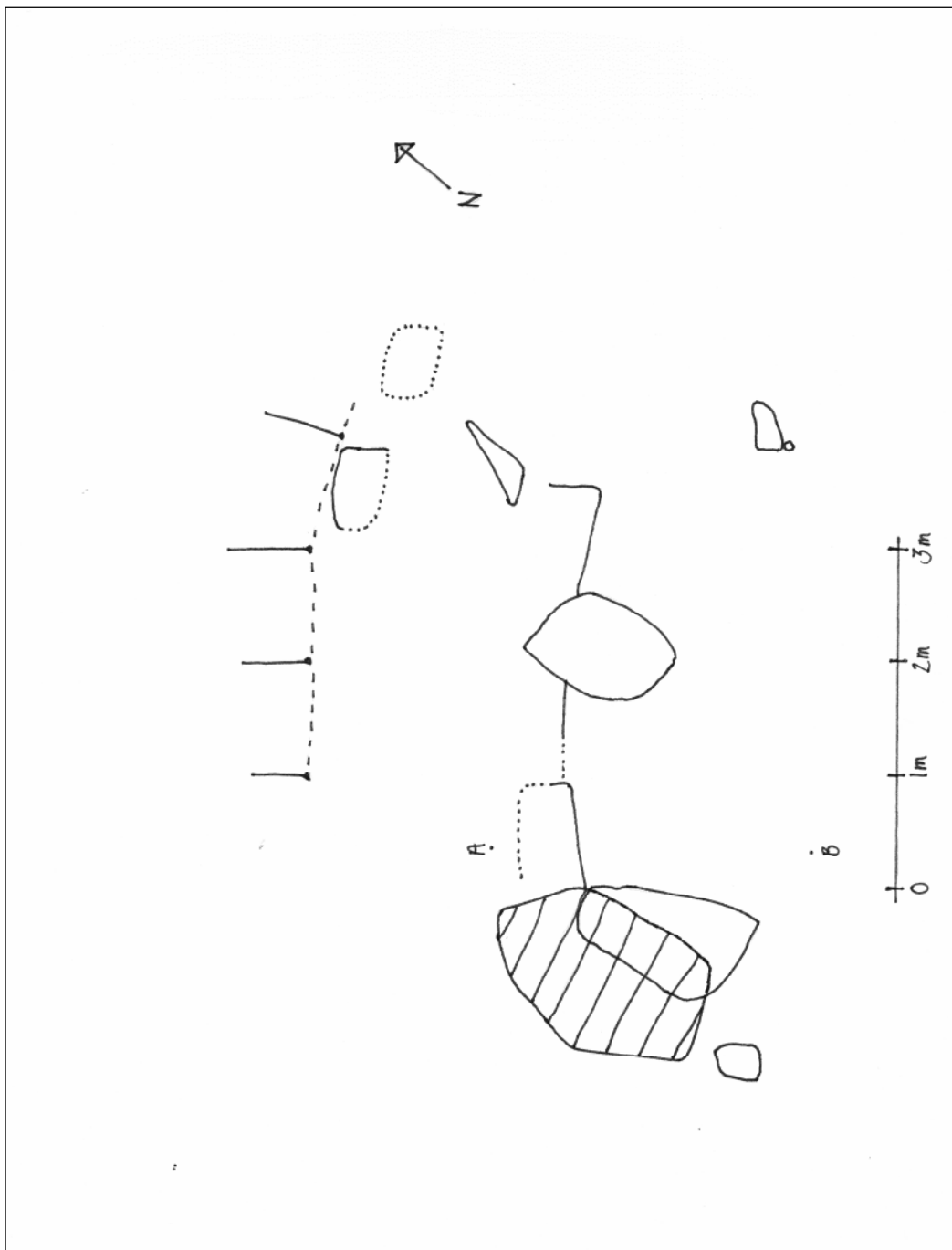
### 8.7.4 Extract from OS 1:10000 map, 1980



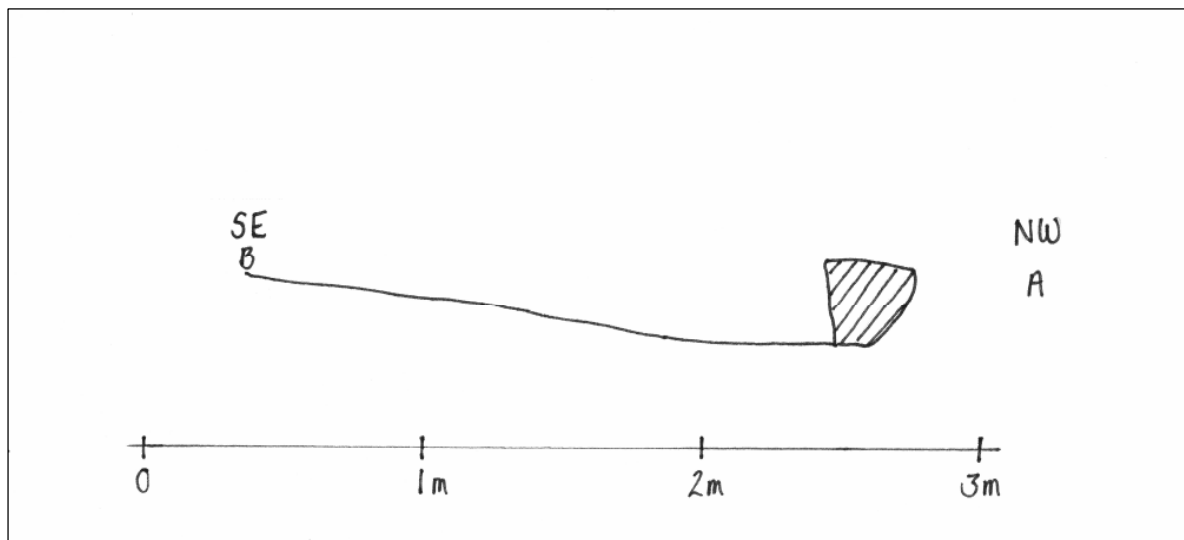
## 8.8 Plan and section drawings

### 8.8.1 Plan of kerbed platform cairn (SM 15377)

(Dotted outline indicates stones found by probing only, hatched stone is propped up, A-B is line of section shown in 8.8.2)



**8.8.2 Section across chamber of kerbed platform cairn (SM 15377)**  
(Stone shown hatched)





## 8.9 Photographs

### 8.9.1 Round cairn (SM 15376) before and after tree surgery





### 8.9.2 Kerbed platform cairn (SM 15377) before and after vegetation clearance





**8.9.3 Possible entrance grave at SV 92295 12366 (north side of root plate)**



**8.9.4 Possible entrance grave at SV 92295 12366 (south side of root plate)**





#### 8.9.5 Possible structure at SV 92271 12346 after vegetation clearance



#### 8.9.6 Possible entrance grave in Civil War battery

