



OAKFORD
ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeological monitoring and recording at Tregarthen's Hotel, Hugh Town, Isles of Scilly



*on behalf of
the client*

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OAKFORD ARCHAEOLOGY

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared for the client and sets out the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by Oakford Archaeology (OA) in December 2021 during building work at Tregarthen's Hotel, Hugh Town, Isles of Scilly (SV 9007 1070). The work was undertaken in response to the grant of planning permission (P/20/090/FUL) for the construction of five 'micro lodges' and associated works. The work was required by the Council of the Isles of Scilly (CIS), as advised by Peter Dudley, the Consultant Archaeologist for the Council of the Isles of Scilly.

1.1 The site

The site (Fig. 1) lies in the northwest part of High Town between the quayside to the north and the Gunners Well Battery to the west. It is located at the rear of the Tregarthen's Hotel in an area of terracing at a height of between 8 and 10mAOD.

The underlying solid geology consists of granite of the Isles of Scilly Intrusion, an igneous bedrock formed approximately 252 to 359 million years ago in the Permian and Carboniferous Periods. No superficial deposits have been recorded within the site, but Quaternary Head deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel lie just to the south. ¹

1.2 Archaeological and historical background

Although there is artefactual evidence for activity pre-dating the Bronze Age, it is currently thought that the Scilly Isles were not permanently settled until the Early Bronze Age. ² Isolated findspots of prehistoric flint implements have been found to the west, south and southeast of the site. The remains of a prehistoric field system have been identified to the northwest of Star Castle while limited evidence suggests that the summit of the Hugh may have been occupied by a Bronze Age cairn field. ³ On top of the prominent ridge forming Buzza Hill, is a chambered cairn. Originally part of a group of three funerary monuments the other two were excavated in 1752 by the antiquary William Borlase. Both were subsequently destroyed as visible monuments by stone robbing and the early 19th century construction of the Buzza Tower. A further cairn is located a short distance to the southeast, while Bronze Age settlement activity in the form of six huts was exposed on the shoreline. Further extensive prehistoric field systems, settlement and funerary activity survives on the promontory of Peninnis Head.

Due to the peripheral location of the islands the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age in Scilly is less clear archaeologically than in other parts of Britain. ⁴ Similarly, the transition to the Roman period is not clear cut either, their location at the western edge of the Channel meant that they were not 'Romanised' like the mainland and the material culture retained many of its pre-Roman traits. ⁵ Evidence for Iron Age/Roman settlement and funerary activity has been identified at Poynters Garden and Parsons Field at the western end of the isthmus later occupied by Hugh Town, while Mount Hollis or Holles, some 50m to the south of the Tregarthen Hotel is, based on the 19th century find of a Roman altar, thought to be the site of a Romano-British shrine. The field system identified to the northwest of Star

¹ www.bgs.ac.uk.

² Johns *et. al.* 2012.

³ CgMs 2020.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

Castle is thought to date to the Iron Age/Romano-British period, while a single sherd of Roman pottery was found during work at the castle.

Little is known of the development of this area in the immediate post-Roman and early Saxon period and the only evidence dating to the early medieval period is a midden uncovered at Parson's Field. Shortly after the Norman Conquest the islands became the property of the crown, with the main settlement during this period at Ennor. The earliest reference to Ennor Castle is in a deed of 1244, at a time when the population of Scilly is thought to be 'about 300'. In 1337 the castle along with the rest of Scilly, was included in the lands of the newly created Duchy of Cornwall.⁶ Although a small quantity of 12th-15th century pottery has been found at Porthcressa,⁷ there is no firm evidence of medieval settlement in Hugh Town during the later Middle Ages.

Despite the provision of cannon in 1554 Ennor castle and its adjacent settlement were gradually eclipsed following the construction of the Star Castle in the early 1590s.⁸ Soon after construction began on a wall with bastions and batteries across the neck of the Hugh, to defend the fort from the landward side.⁹ Kirkham suggests that the Old Quay was built by c.1601 on the sheltered northern side of the island directly below the 'stone-built curtain wall, fronted by a rockcut ditch, ... set across the neck of the headland...'.¹⁰ The proximity of a medieval chapel to the location of the new quay suggests that this may already have been an established landing place,¹¹ and 'Hue or New Towne' and its harbour continued to grow in response to the increasing military development on the Hugh.

Following the end of the Civil War the curtain wall of the Garrison was extended in the late 17th and 18th centuries due to the growing threat of attacks from France and Spain, and the fortification gradually surrounded the majority of the headland. An early 19th century engraving (Fig. 2), based on an earlier engraving of c.1669, shows the harbour, with Star Castle on the summit of the Hugh and the outer works below. The Old Quay is clearly depicted with warehouses and other buildings, and no other buildings or structures are shown immediately in front of the stretch of wall between Gunner's Well Battery and the main Garrison Gate. A survey by Colonel Lilly in 1715 (Fig. 3) found that the fortifications were in need of major repairs. The map clearly shows a large gap between the walls and the nearest buildings by the Old Quay, and the hachures appear to depict a slope or glacis running down from the outer face of the walls, as much as 15m beyond the landward face.¹² This glacis may well have been artificially enhanced with the addition or removal of material to form the slope.¹³

This layout is repeated in Horneck's 1744 map (Fig. 4), which shows the gap between the wall and the harbour buildings, and a clear separation between the buildings and gardens of Hugh Town to the south-east. These views and maps indicate that the site was largely an empty area, and certainly along its western side was a deliberately designed open space forming part of the defensive system. This open space most likely sloped downwards towards

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Kirkham 2003.

⁸ Johns *et. al.* 2012.

⁹ Brodie 2011.

¹⁰ Kirkham 2003.

¹¹ Kirkham forthcoming.

¹² Johns and Fletcher 2010.

¹³ Miller 2015.

the sea. What is not completely clear from the early maps is whether any of the 17th and 18th century harbourside buildings extended into the eastern side of the site.

Hugh Town became the *de facto* administrative and commercial centre of the islands in the early 19th century,¹⁴ the town expanding as its shipbuilding industry, maritime and trading activities grew. Increasingly the islands also became a holiday destination for wealthy English gentlemen who sought out the unique micro-climate and beautiful scenery. The lease of Scilly was taken over from the Godolphin family in 1834 by Augustus Smith and the late 1830s was characterised by the construction of a new church and a large extension to Hugh Town quay. This marked the beginning of a significant eastward expansion of the town, providing the impetus for the development of the town as a seaside resort and leading to the construction of an increasing number of holiday villas and hotels. Tregarthen's Hotel was established as the Islands first dedicated hotel in 1849, the home of Captain Frank Tregarthen who commanded the sailing packet *Ariadne* which delivered mail, provisions and visitors between Penzance and the Isles of Scilly.

2. AIMS

The aims of the archaeological investigations were to determine the presence, extent, character and date of any archaeological deposits or features of historic importance that would be disturbed or removed by the proposed groundworks. This was to be achieved through controlled archaeological excavation, and by recording any archaeological features or deposits exposed during the process; and finally, to record any archaeological features or deposits exposed that would be disturbed or removed by the proposed excavation of the new access path, and to report on the results of the work as appropriate

3. METHODOLOGY

The archaeological work was undertaken in accordance with a project design prepared by RPS (2021), submitted to and approved by the Consultant Archaeologist for the Council of the Isles of Scilly prior to commencement on site.

Machine excavation was undertaken under archaeological control using a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with toothless grading bucket. Topsoil and underlying deposits were removed to the level of either natural subsoil, or the top of archaeological deposits (whichever was higher). Areas of archaeological survival were then cleaned by hand, investigated and recorded.

The standard OA recording system was employed. Stratigraphic information was recorded on *pro-forma* context record sheets, plans and sections for each trench were drawn at a scale of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate and a detailed black and white print and colour (digital) photographic record was made. Registers were maintained for photographs, drawings and context sheets on *pro forma* sheets.

¹⁴ Johns *et. al.* 2012.

4. RESULTS

4.1 The trench (Fig. 5; pls. 1-3)

The trench for the new foul drain was excavated over a distance of approximately 15.2m along the northern edge of the former garden. The trench was approximately 0.7-0.9m wide and excavated to a maximum depth of 1.3m. A light to mid greyish brown silty sand with lenses of mid orange yellow silty sand (105) and frequent inclusions of fine granite fragments was uncovered at the base of the trench. Interpreted as a growan natural subsoil, this deposit was overlain by a 0.24m thick loosely compacted mid yellowish brown clayey sand (104) and interpreted as a remnant subsoil. This was in turn overlain by a 0.46m thick mid greyish brown sandy silt (103) which was in turn sealed underneath a 0.43m thick dark greyish brown sandy silt (102) with rare inclusions of cbm. Both layers are interpreted as former garden soils, the former perhaps in part a reworked topsoil in origin. A 0.03m thick lense of mid orange yellow silty sand (101), interpreted as a redeposited natural, was in turn sealed underneath a 0.18m thick dark greyish brown sandy silt (100) topsoil containing modern building material.

A small collection of archaeological material was recovered from the topsoil (100), consisting of a single sherd of English stoneware (19th century) and six sherds of late 19th century industrial whitewares including Staffordshire transfer-printed ware and cream ware.

5. CONCLUSION

The work has provided an insight into the development of this area, identifying a succession of former garden soils overlying the intact former soil sequence. The excavations failed to identify any evidence for a rock-cut ditch and the possible presence of a former subsoil suggests that the defensive works between Gunner's Well Battery and the main Garrison Gate may simply have taken advantage of the natural slope. In addition, the removal of the soils failed to identify evidence for earlier deep archaeological features.

Finally, the presence of a number of late post-medieval wares, consisting entirely of domestic fabrics and forms, within the garden soil is consistent with activity associated with the nearby 19th century Tregarthen Hotel.

6. PROJECT ARCHIVE

Due to the limited nature of the findings a project archive will not be produced. A summary of the archaeological investigations has been submitted to the on-line archaeological database OASIS (oakforda1- 504404).

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Jonathan Martin; the illustrations for the report were prepared by Marc Steinmetzer. Thanks are hereby recorded to John Allan who undertook the finds analysis.

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Fig. 1 Location of site.



Fig. 2 Detail (above) from the 1822 engraving of Star Castle based on a c.1669 engraving.



Fig. 3 Detail (left) from the 1715 Plan of the Hugh by Christian Lilly.



Fig. 4 Detail from Horneck's 1744 Plan of Hugh Fort.

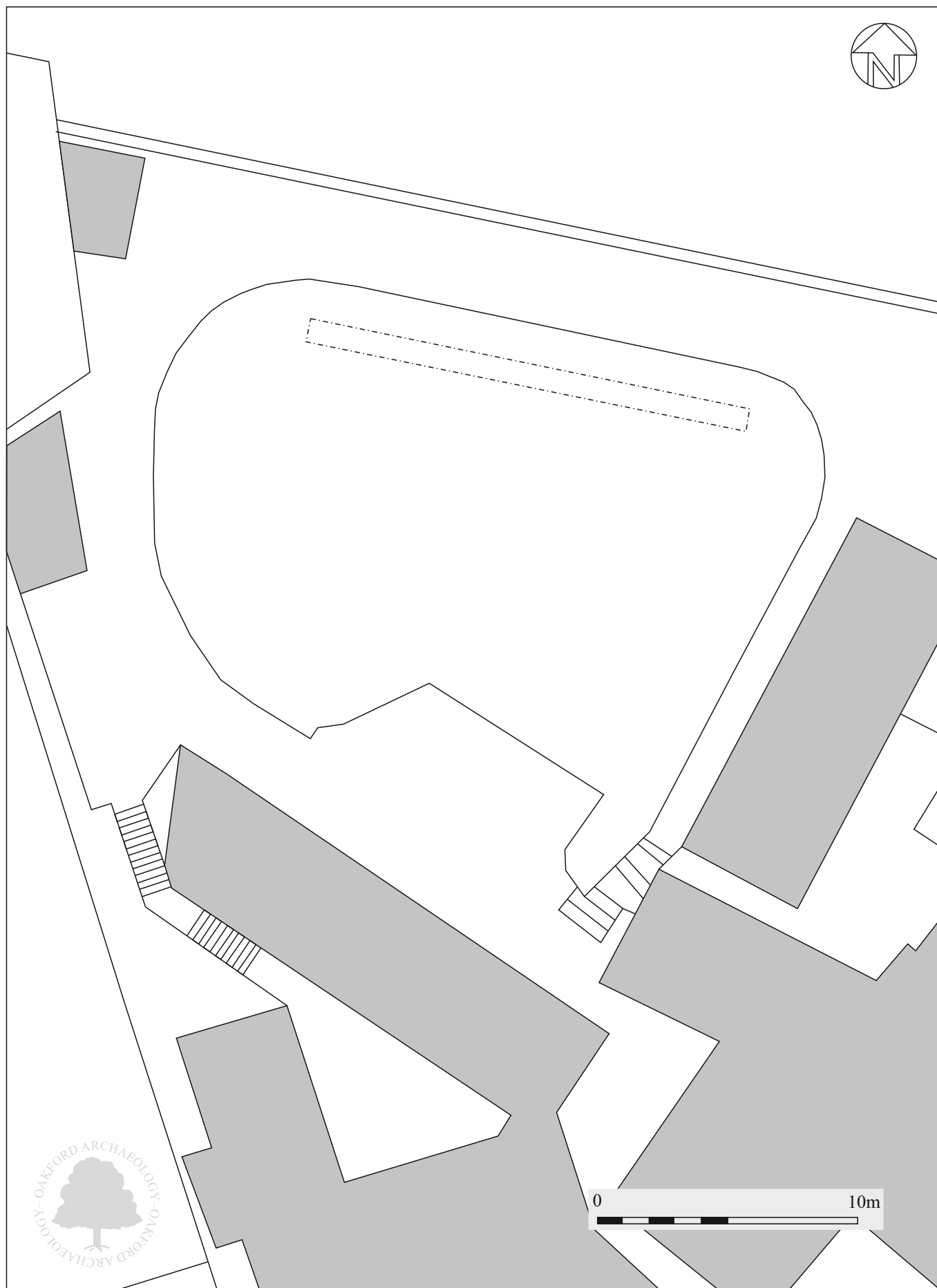


Fig. 5 Plan showing location of observations.



Pl. 1 General view of the service trench showing depth of deposits above growan natural subsoil. 1m scale. Looking east.



Pl. 2 General view of the service trench showing depth of deposits above growan natural subsoil. 1m scale. Looking west.



Pl. 3 Section through service trench showing depth of deposit sequence above growan natural subsoil. 1m scale. Looking north.