

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT APPRAISAL

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT
OF BOROUGH FARM ON TRESCO IN THE ISLES OF SCILLY

APPENDIX G
EXTRACTS FROM THE ISLES OF SCILLY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT 2002

for
THE TRESCO ESTATE

June 2025
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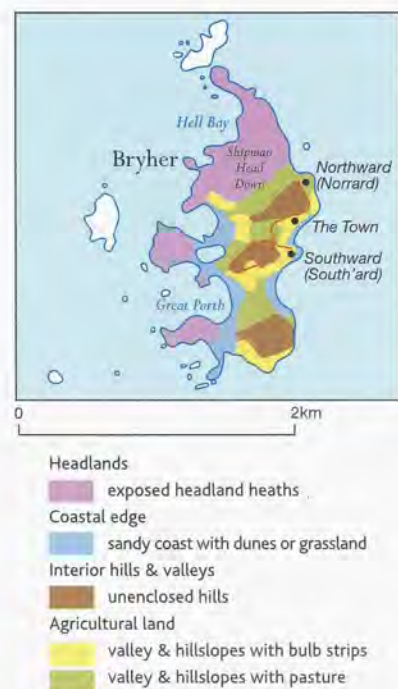
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AUTHOR(S)	Mark Gibbins and Iona Brandt	-	2025-06-23	MG/IB	MG	First issue
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rough ground of gorse and bracken extend up the hillslopes, linking the settlement in the centre of the island with the unenclosed heathland and downs around the edges of the island. Although St Agnes lacks the changes in topography found on some of the other islands, there are subtle differences that give the island a distinctive and special character. Of particular note are the shelter fences on the enclosed land, which contain a wide range of species including wind-stunted elms, particularly around Middle Town, and gnarled tamarisks as well as euonymus, veronica, pittosporum and olearia. These combine to create a subtle patchwork of colour and texture on the central slopes and give the island an almost wooded appearance when it is viewed from the lower coastal edges.

On Gugh, the central, sandy portion of the island was cultivated in the early part of the 20th century and a number of bulb fields were established, surrounded by mixed hedges of veronica, escallonia, euonymus and pittosporum. These fields, which are now abandoned, remain as a testimony to the former agricultural activity on this island.

Farming on St Agnes remains in reasonably good heart and for this reason the landscape has an attractive, well cared for and managed appearance.



Bryher

“The appeal of Bryher lies in its precarious man versus environment position. It is an island romantically cliff-hanging between cultivation and civilisation on the one hand and return to nature and depopulation on the other.”

Mumford, 1967 [10].

Bryher is located in the north-west corner of the archipelago. The island has a more varied topography than any of the other islands and indeed the place name ‘Bre-yr’ means place of the hills. The island is essentially composed of a series of small, gently rounded, gorse covered interior hills that rise above the intervening valley pastures that run east–west across the island. The exposed headland heath of Shipman Head Down, with its wind-pruned vegetation of maritime grassland and waved heath, extends to the north of the island. The rugged cliffs on the wilder northern and western sides of the island, for example at Hell Bay, are open and exposed to the Atlantic, while in contrast the east coast is sheltered and separated from Tresco by narrow, sandy flats. Bryher was connected to Tresco until medieval times and it is still possible to wade between the islands at some low tides. The coast on the south-west side of the island is different again, with a shallow, sandy foreshore backed by dunes and dune pasture.

The enclosed agricultural landscape is also diverse. The lateral valleys are predominantly pasture, with small irregular fields enclosed by



Bryher is composed of a series of small hills and valleys. The granite barns and farmhouses sheltering on the slopes are important features of the agricultural landscape.



sinuous stone wall boundaries. In contrast the sheltered hillsides have been enclosed as tiny bulb strips with neat, parallel shelter fences of pittosporum and euonymus. The intimate and domestic landscape of the bulb strips has a very high visual impact, especially when viewed from the sea or by looking across the island from one of the three interior hills. While they would at one time have covered much of the coastal edge and hillsides, these bulb strips now only cover a relatively small area. Settlement is focused in three small hamlets at Norrard, The Town and South'ard, which shelter in the lee of the hills on the eastern side of the island.

Bryher is essentially an island of contrasts, with a varied topography. The rugged north and west aspect contrasts with the sheltered east coast, and green pastures in the lateral valleys contrast with the small-scale hedged bulb strips. Agriculture is marginal and a number of areas, notably the interior hills, are no longer managed and have become dominated by bracken and gorse. This, combined with its open and exposed aspect, gives it a ‘wilderness’ quality that is not so evident on the other islands.

St Martin's

“The pellucidness of the sea through which the sand, rocks and weeds at the bottom are distinctly visible; the spacious bay with its broad, fabulous, glittering sand; the boats of varied size, construction and color lying along the beach or gently riding on the waves; the varied hues of cultivation adorning the steep acclivity of the shore; the whitened walls of many of the dwellings by which the whole is overtopped; the rocky chaos on Cruther's Hill to the left; the bold cliff and fresh ocean stretching to the extent of the horizon to the right; form a picture which may be contemplated with much interest.”

Woodley, 1882 [11].

St Martin's is located in the north-east corner of the archipelago. The island comprises a long ridge of granite that forms a central spine running east–west along the centre of the island. To the north of the ridge there is an exposed windswept plateau, while to the north east the heath covered granite headland of Chapel Down juts out into the Atlantic. In the past the hilltop plateau has been enclosed and, although some of the fields remain in agricultural use, most have been abandoned. The distinctive red and white striped St Martin's day mark is a dominant feature on the headland, identifying it in views from the sea and other islands. Blown sand cloaks much of the central granite ridge, creating the barren, bracken-covered area known as the Plains in the northern part of the island.

To the south of the central spine the land slopes down in a series of bowls and hollows to the low-lying, sandy fields that front the



Chapel Down, St Martin's, with the distinctive red and white striped day mark.

interior sea. The island's population gathers in three settlements sheltering below the central plateau: Higher Town, Middle Town and Lower Town.

The sheltered, south-facing slopes provide some of the best placed land for cultivation and have been divided into narrow plots by shelter fences of euonymus, escallonia and pittosporum which sweep down the long slopes of the hillsides in parallel lines towards the sea. A few glasshouses from the turn of the 19th century remain within the settlements or attached to dwellings, reminders of what would at that time have been a distinctive feature of this landscape. The pattern, definition and order of the bulb strip landscape has been blurred in recent years by the loss of hedges to frost and the decline in maintenance. Many fields are now choked with bracken and the hedges only remain as a ragged, gappy outline. As the bulb strip landscape has started to lose focus, the pattern of earlier field systems is once again becoming discernible. The pattern of enclosure on the hilltop has similarly been obscured as many of these marginal fields have regenerated with gorse.

Areas of the plateau around Middle Town and Higher Town in particular are still in productive agricultural use. Here, there is a mixture of both grass pasture and bulb fields. Polytunnels and shelter hedges of pittosporum and euonymus provide additional enclosure and protection.

Overall, the impression on St Martin's is of an island that is reverting to a wilder, unmanaged landscape, although with a number of holdings entering the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, and the positive management of the land leased to the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust, this process may start to be reversed.

St Mary's

“From the ground the skylines are disturbed; from the air the island is beginning to appear sophisticated. Yet behind this change lies all the romance of seas and rocks, of wild flowers and human history....”

Jellicoe, 1965 [12].

St Mary's is the largest of the islands. Its varied coastline includes the distinctive granite outcrops at Peninnis Head, which have been weathered into spectacular and dramatic features. Rising from a low, rocky coastline the interior of the island is gently undulating and includes the low, rounded plateau hills at Halangy Down, the golf course and the airport; the narrow wooded valleys at Watermill and Holy Vale; and the wider, low-lying freshwater areas of Higher Moors and Lower Moors. The only freshwater stream in the archipelago rises at Holy Vale and flows through Higher Moor to the sea at Porth Hellick.



On the whole of Scilly, it is perhaps only in the interior hollows and lush wooded valleys of St Mary's that it is possible to be unaware of the surrounding seas.

On the whole of Scilly, it is perhaps only in the interior hollows and lush wooded valleys of St Mary's that it is possible to be unaware of the influence of the sea.

The main part of the island is connected to the Garrison headland by the low-lying sandy neck at Hugh Town. The Garrison is a rounded granite promontory on the south side of St Mary's. This strategically important headland controlled the main deep water channel into Scilly's main harbour. It contains an impressive range of fortifications, spanning some 350 years and representing successive periods of raiding, hostility and war. The Garrison is of national importance for the complexity and survival of its fortifications and this military character is now the dominant feature of the landscape. The Garrison walls are also noted for the rare and unusual plant communities that they support.

The larger fields and relative isolation from the sea mean that agricultural land on St Mary's is more homogeneous in character than that found on the off-islands. There are, however, many distinctive features that provide pattern and grain in the landscape. This is even seen between bulbfields, where current crops are generally picked while in bud, contrasting with abandoned fields where rare arable weeds and volunteers from old flower crops create vibrant splashes of colour. Trees are prominent on St Mary's and the Monterey pine shelter belts, originally planted in the mid-19th century under the influence of Augustus Smith, are a particularly distinguishing feature. They occur along the north and east coasts, on the Garrison and in blocks in the centre of the island, providing shelter and protection for the farmland. The shelter belts, which are reaching the end of their natural life, were devastated by the exceptionally strong winter winds in 1990 and today in many areas only the ragged outline of broken-topped trees remains. Elms are also a distinctive feature. Many of these were originally planted as hedges along field boundaries and lanes but have been left to grow on. Today, the lines or avenues of wind-sculpted, lichen-encrusted trees create an impressive landscape feature. In other areas elms have naturally recolonised and dense elm scrub can be found, for example on the lower slopes of the Garrison or the low-lying areas around Lower Moors and Higher Moors. Remnant orchards, containing traditional island varieties of apple and other fruit trees, can also be found around some of the older farms, and as isolated trees in Holy Vale and along the coastal edge.

The moors on St Mary's were at one time grazed by cattle and relic early enclosures survive as surface features. Documentary evidence also exists for the mires having been important sources of peat for fuel, and remnants of peat cuts and baulks can still be clearly seen at both Higher and Lower Moors. The remaining peat is also an important palaeoenvironmental resource, as the pollen it contains provides valuable information about the vegetation history of the Islands since Mesolithic times.

The interior of St Mary's is more heavily settled than the other inhabited islands, with a number of isolated farmsteads as well as small clusters of dwellings. Documentary evidence suggests that many of these (Trenoweth, Helvear, Holy Vale and Normandy) existed in medieval times.

Narrow winding lanes, most of medieval or earlier origin, provide links to these settlements, to the coast and to Hugh Town. The grassy verges provide an important habitat and in spring and summer they create a colourful display, including both native wildflowers, such as campion, bluebell and buttercups, and garden escapes, as well as naturalised narcissi, including many old varieties that are no longer grown commercially.

Of all of the islands, St Mary's has experienced the greatest pressure for development, and in some cases there are highly visible developments, such as the radio masts at Halangy Down and installations associated with the airport and new buildings. These intrude greatly within the small-scale agricultural landscape.

Hugh Town

Hugh Town is the only sizeable settlement and is the modern commercial and administrative centre of the Islands. It lies around the natural harbour of St Mary's Pool, which has long provided a haven for ships from the treacherous seas surrounding the islands.

Today, the harbour continues to provide the main deep water anchorage in Scilly. Throughout the year, the quay to Rat Island is the principal focus of activity, with the unloading and loading of freight ships and the arrival and departure of numerous small craft. The quay forms the hub for visitors, and during the tourist season the scene is enlivened with the departure of the off-island launches and daily docking of 'The Scillonian' passenger ferry.

The sandy bays at Town Beach and Porthcressa border the town to the north and south, respectively. The distance between the two bays is little more than 50 metres and on rare occasions the two tides have met, flooding the town. With rising sea levels the inundation of Hugh Town and separation of St Mary's into two separate islands is a likely scenario in the long term.

Hugh Town forms the main concentration of freehold land on Scilly and for this reason there is intense development pressure, with buildings tightly crammed within its boundaries. The buildings are low in height and huddled close together in shelter from the gales and salt spray. They are found in a variety of styles and designs, ranging from simple terraces of two and three storeys, to larger Regency-style houses such as Lemon Hall and Lyonesse. The main street extends through a series of open 'squares', with more enclosed areas and several narrow lanes and alleys running off this central street, providing glimpses of the sea on either side.



The quay at Hugh Town is the focus for tourist activity on the Islands.



Tresco

“When I first walked through Abbey Wood on the south side of Tresco, the sun was pushing through the high branches, dripping its golden light down the cracked bark of the pines. A musty smell of damp leaves and dying needles filled my nose. Through the gaps in the trees at the foot of the hill, the long blue shock of the Great Pool lay waiting. The Great Pool nearly splits the island in two and on either side lies hillside woodland. No other Scillonian island can offer such a walk.”

Hunt, 1989 [13].

Tresco essentially comprises three low, rounded granite hills separated by broad lateral east–west valleys. Castle Down forms an exposed headland heath extending to the north of the island. In the centre, Middle Down has a wooded summit, with shelter belts extending down and around the agricultural land on the slopes, and Abbey Hill shelters the subtropical gardens at Tresco Abbey. The southernmost part of the island between Appletree Bay and Pentle Bay comprises a flat, low-lying area of blown sand and an extensive dune system. The main settlements of Old Grimsby, Dolphin Town and New Grimsby lie within the sheltered valley between Castle Down and Middle Down, while the valley between Middle Down and Abbey Hill contains the Great Pool and its associated marshes.

On Tresco the underlying rocks, resulting topography and landcover are closely interwoven and create a very distinctive landscape. The wild, heathy headland in the north gives way, first to the managed agricultural landscape in the central part of the island, with its small fields, shelter belts and settlements, and then to the flat, sandy coastal dune systems to the south. Unlike the irregular fields on the other islands, here much of the field pattern was rationalised by Augustus Smith and his successors. This has left larger fields with straight boundaries generally constructed in the Tresco Estate 'house style'. The extensive woodlands and shelter belts planted by Augustus Smith (and later by Thomas Algernon Dorrien-Smith) to reduce wind speeds and filter salt from the north-easterly winds, are a distinctive feature of Tresco. Despite the ravages of the 1990 storm, Tresco is still the most wooded island, its hilltops and crest clothed with dense plantations that extend down the slopes. These are predominantly Monterey pines and cypress, but also include sycamore, holm oak, willow, rhododendron, elm and eucalyptus. Following the storm an intensive planting programme, supported by the Countryside Agency and English Heritage, has been undertaken to retain and reinforce this characteristic. The subtropical gardens at Tresco Abbey are arguably one of the most well-known features of Scilly. Originally begun in the mid-19th century by Augustus Smith, they have subsequently been



Neptune's Steps, the centrepiece of Tresco Abbey's subtropical garden.

tended by his descendants and now contain an impressive collection of plants from the five continents.

Today the whole island is leased under one tenancy to the Dorrien-Smith family. This gives the island a very distinctive character, with its well-managed farmland that is maintained largely through income from tourism.

Uninhabited islands

The islands of Tean, Samson, St Helen's and Annet are defined as a separate landscape type, since although small in extent they all support vegetation. For reasons of their size, they are distinct from the smaller rocks and islands that were described in Chapter 4. In many respects these islands are miniature versions of the larger inhabited islands and represent a range of landscapes. Heathland and headlands, sandy beaches, rocky coastline, inland gorse covered hills and low-lying sandy valleys are all condensed into the tiny area of each island. Evidence of past settlement includes the chapels on St Helen's and Tean and the dwellings on Samson which were abandoned in 1855 and immortalised in Walter Bessant's novel, *Armored of Lyonesse* [3]. Bronze Age entrance graves are also found on all of these islands, showing much earlier use. Annet, as well as being a bird reserve, is renowned for its carpet of sea pinks, which represents one of the best developed areas of thrift turf in the British Isles. All of these islands are of exceptional nature conservation interest, particularly for sea birds, and are all designated as SSSI.

The last inhabitants of Samson were evicted by Augustus Smith in 1855. Their ruined houses and stone-walled fields survive.



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LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF BOROUGH FARM ON TRESCO IN THE ISLES OF SCILLY

EXTRACTS FROM THE ISLES OF SCILLY DESIGN GUIDE 2006

for
THE TRESCO ESTATE

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Tresco

“ Through the gaps in the trees at the foot of the hill, the long blue shock of the Great Pool lay awaiting. The Great Pool nearly splits the island in two and on either side lies hillside woodland. No other Scillonian island can offer such a walk.”

(Hunt, J, Islands apart: the Isles of Scilly 1989)

Character of Tresco

Tresco, like Bryher, has a roughly linear north / south orientation. The northern headland known as Castle Down or North End features two important castles: the remains of King Charles' Castle on high ground overlooking the channel and the prominent round tower of Cromwell's Castle on the western shoreline. The southern end of Tresco is dominated by the wooded upland of Middle Down and Abbey Wood which shelters the house and gardens of Tresco Abbey. The valley between Middle Down and Abbey Hill contains the scenic 'Great Pool', a linear brackish lake surrounded by marshes that almost separates the island in two.

The shoreline around Tresco is generally characterised by sandy beaches and coastal dune systems. It also has the island's most dramatic cliffs at its northern end. There are extremely attractive bays such as Green Porth with its sandy beach and prominent military Blockhouse on the adjacent headland. The heathy headland in the north gives way in the central part of the island to a managed and enclosed field system with the small hamlets of New Grimsby, Dolphin Town and Old Grimsby stretching across the middle of the island from the west to east coast

Since the nineteenth century the island has been leased to the Dorrien-Smith family who have managed the landscape to create a unique character. Larger more regular fields were created. Extensive woodlands predominantly of Monterey Pine which were planted on the hills and as shelter belts have long since matured. Augustus Smith also started the subtropical gardens in the mid -19th Century. Today the gardens are an attractive and well known feature of Tresco and of the Isles of Scilly in general.



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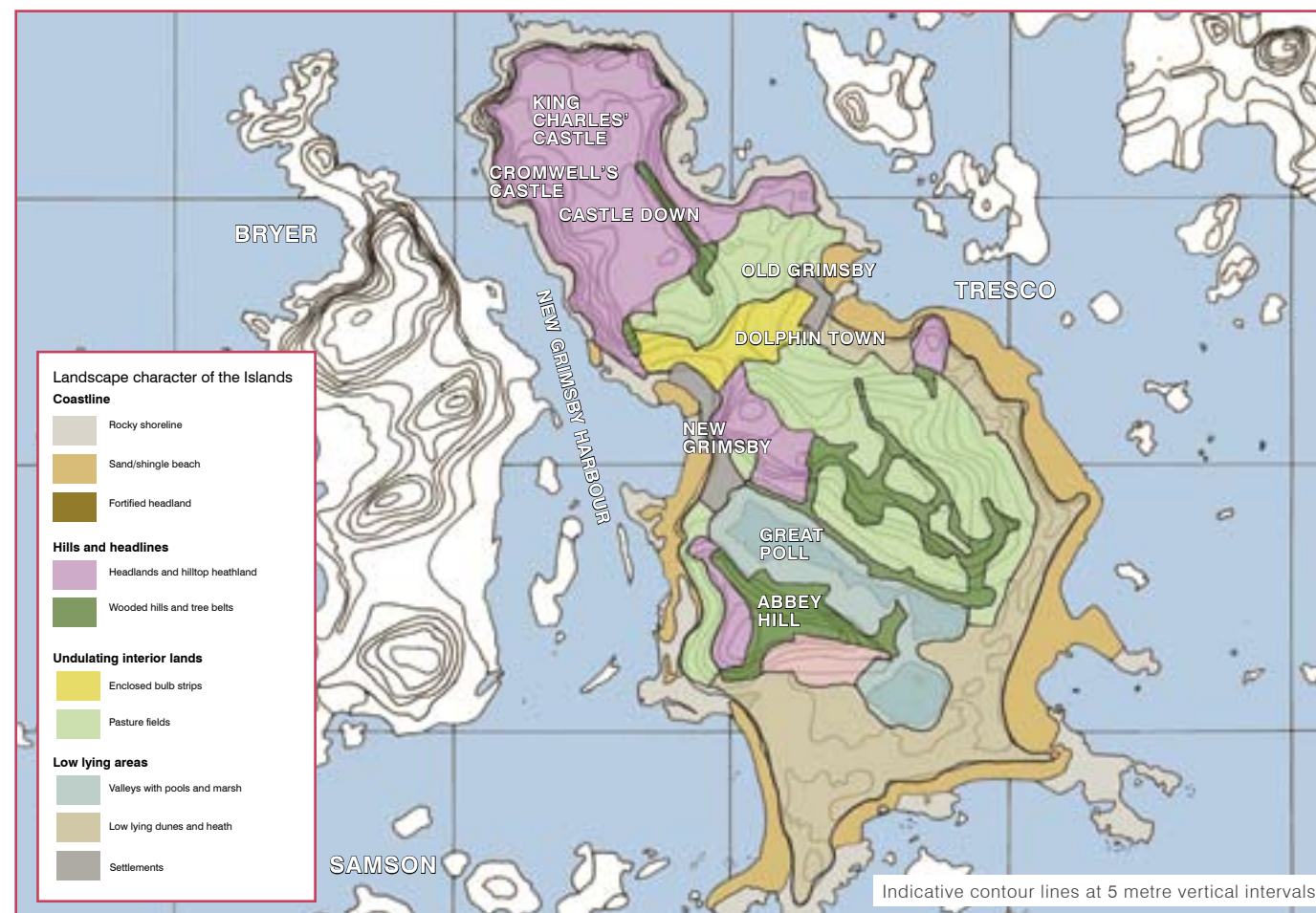


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Porches on Tresco

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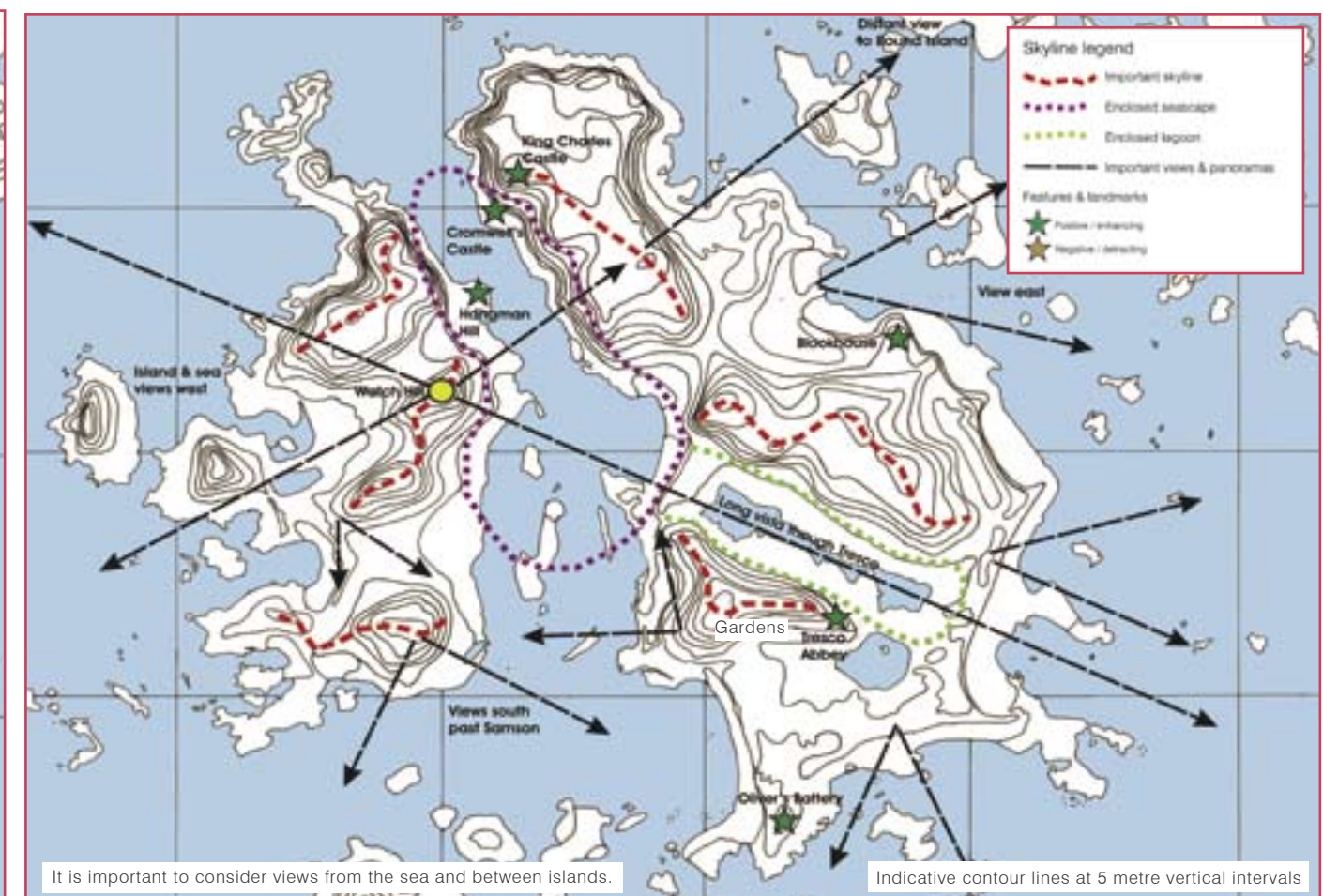
The Signature of Scilly



Landscape character of Tresco

37

The Signature of Scilly



Skyline of Tresco

St Martin's

The spacious bay with its broad, fabulous, glittering sand...the rocky chaos of Cruther's Hill to the left; the bold cliff and fresh ocean stretching to the extent of the horizon to the right; form a picture which may be contemplated with much interest"
(Woodley, G, A view of the present state of the Scilly Islands, 1882)

Character of St Martin's

St Martin's is the most northerly inhabited island. It takes the form of a long narrow shape with a ridge line running approximately east to west along the centre of the island. Close to the west of the island is the uninhabited island Tean. White Island which is accessible from St Martin's at low tide lies to the North. The Eastern Isles, a group of uninhabited islands lie to the eastern end of St Martin's. The northern side consists of exposed headland heaths and wild sandy beaches with dunes and a series of high points from Top Rock Hill, Turfy Hill to Chapel Down, that form headlands along the coast. Chapel Down and St Martin's Head are dominated by the distinctive red and white striped Daymark navigation marker.

The southern side of the island is in the lee of the ridgeline. Here there is more shelter and the landscape is one of small fields enclosed by stone walls and evergreen hedges and areas of bulb strips set around the three settlements of Lower Town, Middle Town and Higher Town. A single narrow road links the settlements and the high water and low water quays.

The southern shoreline is sculpted into two distinctive curving beaches; Lawrence's Bay and Par Beach, separated by a prominent headland of Cruther's Hill.

St Martin's

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The middle of the island around Higher Town has been illustrated to demonstrate the typical landscape character and settlement pattern. The more rugged northern coast is illustrated showing the stretches of exposed heathland and rocky shoreline in the vicinity of Turfy Hill.

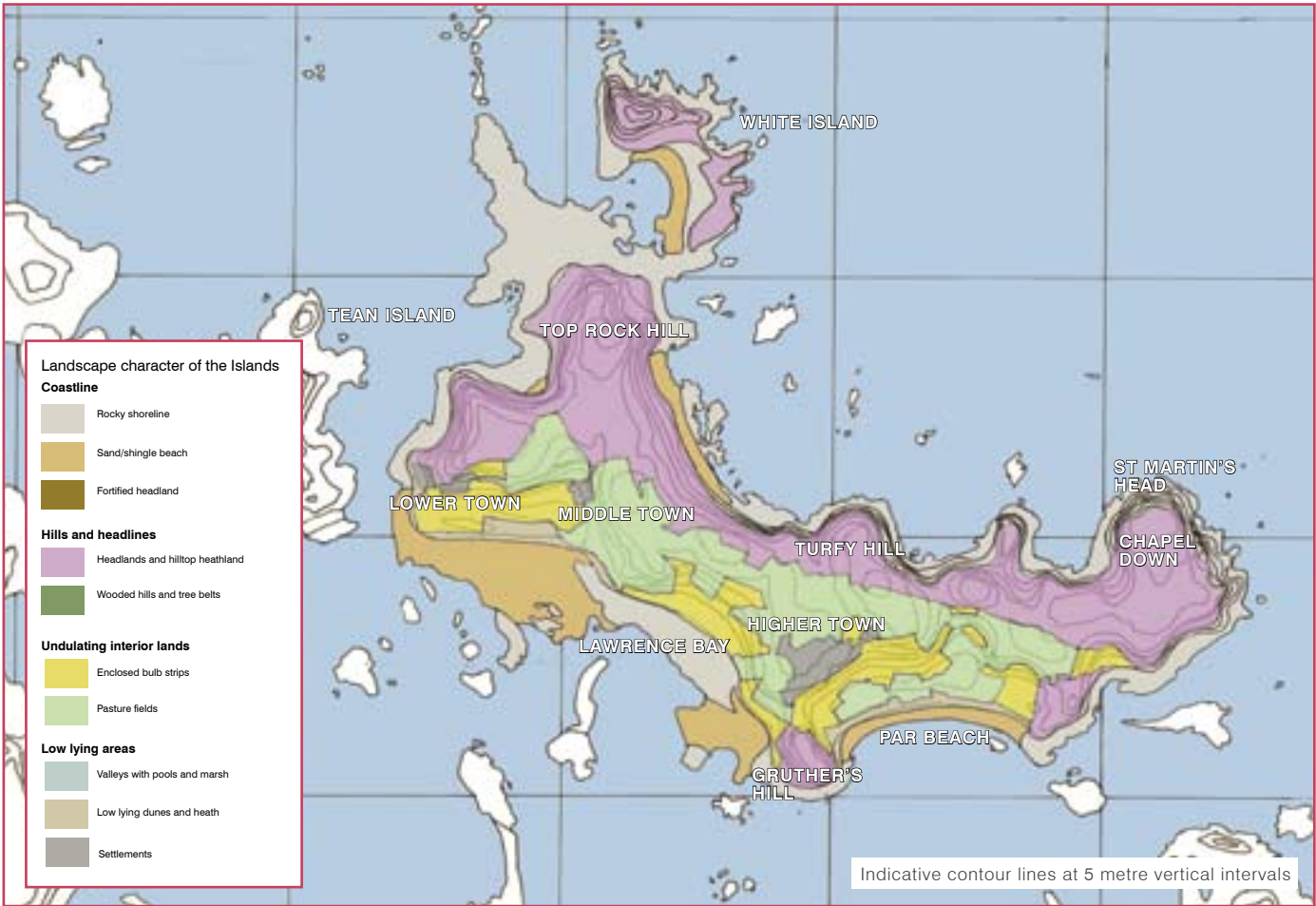
The southern, or lee side of the island's meridian ridge is more sheltered and the inhabitants have established over the centuries a cultivated landscape of fields enclosed by green hedgerows, (locally known as fences) and stone walls (locally known as hedges). There are clear patches of bulb strips and larger more regular fields for grazing.

The narrow linear bulb strips are generally orientated in a south or south westerly direction giving rise to a distinctive pattern of parallel hedges sweeping down to the sea along the southern shore.

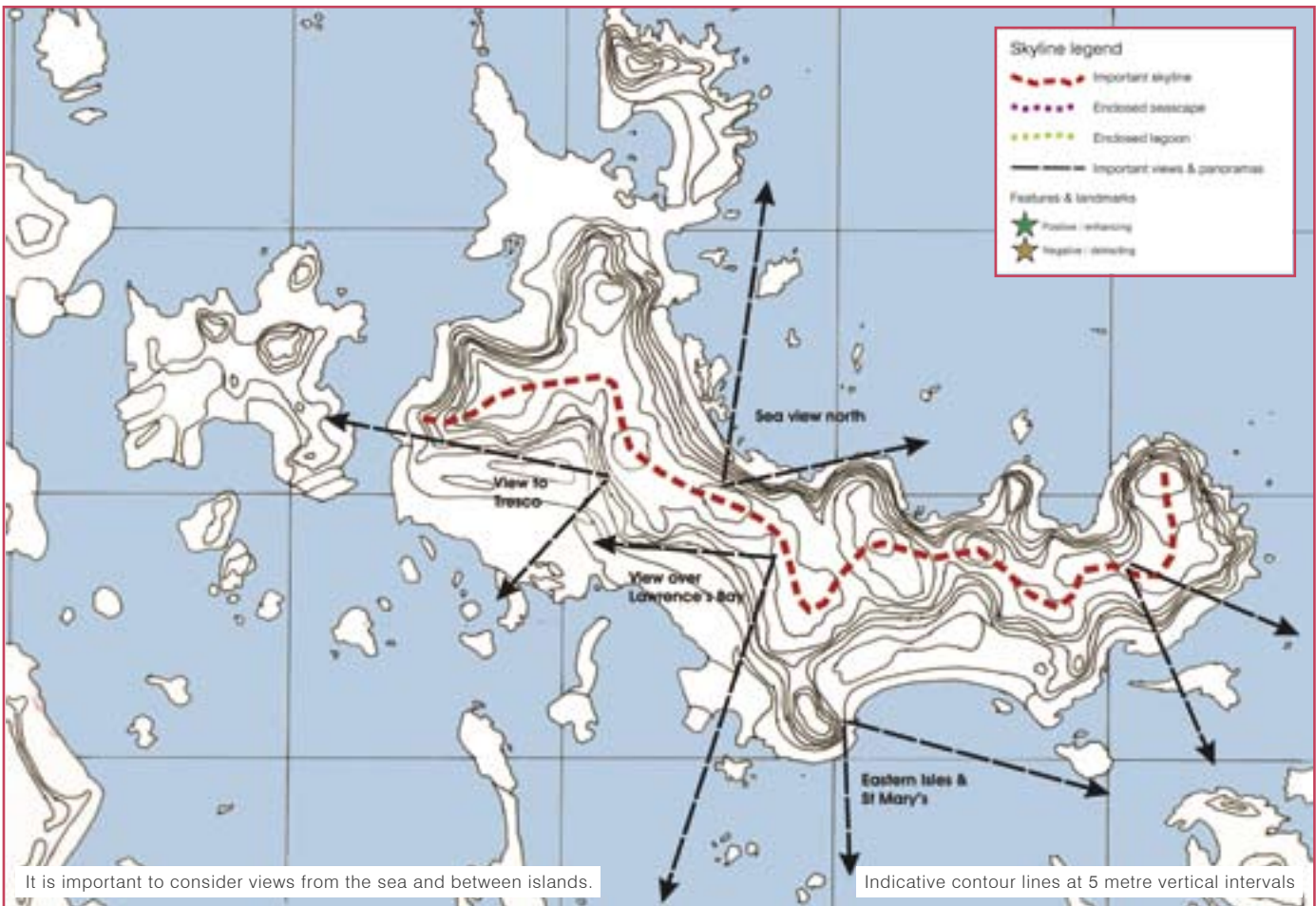
Higher Town is clustered along the south facing slope between Turfy Hill and the distinctive round top of Cruther's Hill on the southern shore.



Detailed landscape character, St Martin's



Landscape character of St Martin's



Skyline of St Martin's