

Assignment 1: Archaeological Project Assessment

This essay makes specific reference to a project undertaken by Cornwall Archaeological Unit (hereafter CAU) in 2020-2021. Gwynearth in Rosudgeon, Cornwall was a historic miner's cottage (Figure 1) located within the Tregonning and Gwinear Mining District of the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site. Planning permission was granted for the demolition of the building and as part of the conditional consent, a historic building record was undertaken prior to the works taking



Figure 1 South elevation of Gwynearth © Cornwall Council

place, and a watching brief was to be undertaken during the groundworks at the site. Prior to the fieldwork commencing a written scheme of investigation (WSI) was submitted to planning which laid out the research aims and objectives of the project. The aim of the project was to create a detailed record of the building before it was demolished and to create a record of any archaeological features exposed during the groundworks of the new development. The aims were:

- To produce an accurate record of the building along with its fabric, fixtures and fittings (Level 2 to Level 3 as appropriate and as defined by Historic England 2016).
- To create a phased historic development of the building (in plan form and written description).
- To produce a record of any archaeological features exposed during the development.

The working methods for the recording of the building prior to its demolition were to adhere to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) guidance (2014a-e) and code of conduct (2017). There was no provision made in the methodology for archival research, and the project was to rely on the research done in the heritage impact assessment (HIA) that had been undertaken several years prior (Sturgess 2018). The methodologies for the historic building recording were to include the creation of a measured ground floor plan of the building (as far as Health and Safety requirements allowed). Measured detail was added to the drawings along with annotations to provide details of both the historic development and the existing fabric (Motley and Sturgess 2021, p. 47). Colour photographs of all exterior elevations were taken with a digital camera along with interior room spaces and important or interpretive architectural details, the photographs forming the archive. As far as possible the images included a metric scale bar, apart from when Health and Safety policies made this impossible (Motley and Sturgess 2021, p. 47). Written descriptions of the exterior and interior were made in note form and by annotation of the plan to record the fabric and construction of the building and help create phased development through time. The interiors were described room by room (Motley and Sturgess 2021, p. 47).

The methods employed for the historic building record were appropriate and well suited to the project's objectives. The methods allowed for a comprehensive and high-level record of the building to be created prior to its demolition and ultimate loss. However the specific level of recording was left to interpretation, stating that the recording would be undertaken to Level 2 or Level 3. Historic England defines Level 2 as a "descriptive record" (Historic England 2016, p. 26), used on "a building which is judged not to require a more detailed record" (Historic England 2016, p. 26). Whereas Level 3 is considered an "analytical record" (Historic England 2016, p. 26), which should entail "a systematic account of the building's origins, development and use" (Historic England 2016, p. 26), with the report primarily containing information that has been collected from the building itself, as well as documentary sources. The methodology presented in the WSI stated that a measured floor plan of the building would be created. This is a requirement of a Level 3 survey, and all of the methods of research undertaken in the project in fact fall within the requirements for a Level 3 or even Level 4 survey. Therefore a higher level of survey detail was undertaken than was actually required, which helped to achieve the aims of the project.



Figure 2 Blocked door opening in the north elevation after the removal of the render © Cornwall Council.

Upon accessing the building it became clear that the building was of greater significance than had been previously thought. When the HIA was undertaken in 2018 it was not possible to access the majority of the building as it had been abandoned for around 30 years (Sturgess 2018, p. 6), in which time the roof of the building had collapsed, allowing water ingress, and thus the building had become heavily overgrown. During the historic building recording it was discovered that the building was likely of early 18th century date, possibly predating the mining activity in the area. At the rear of the house there was a blocked arched door opening (Figure 2) constructed of cob which related to a former through-passage (cross passage). In addition to this, surviving internal features which had been previously unknown were revealed when access to the building was made possible by vegetation clearance. Among these were an 18th century six panelled door and 18th or 19th century plank and muntin panelling around the staircase. As such, the methods used for recording the building were altered to go beyond what had been initially proposed. A measured first floor plan was created as accurately as health and safety considerations allowed, and elevation drawings were also created and annotated. A watching brief was then undertaken during the demolition of the building which allowed for further data collection. As a result of watching the demolition, a blocked door opening into the former through-passage was identified which had been previously hidden behind lath and plaster. The watching of the demolition also allowed for the construction of the building to be better understood. The lifting of the concrete floors revealed that there was no survival of historic surfaces beneath, and that the floors themselves related to the most recent phase of construction at the site in the 1970s – as evidenced by modern aggregate sacks beneath the floor. The data collected during the historic building record comprised digital photographs of the exterior and interior of the building, measured floor plans, measured elevations, information on the phased development of the building, written descriptions of the exterior of the building and of each (accessible) room, where each individual wall was described. Although not part of the original planned methodology for data collection, it was decided on site to experiment with photogrammetric recording of the house, (at this time new technology to CAU) which provided additional data that was used when creating the floor plans and elevation drawings. Orthophotos of the front and rear elevations of the building were included in the report (Motley and Sturgess 2021, p. 34) to enhance the record of the building. All of this data was written up into a report which was submitted to Oasis and to the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Historic

Environment Record (hereafter HER). The report will be made accessible to the public on the HER mapping website (Cornwall Council 2023), and has been logged in their event record. A selection of the images from the project were archived with the Archaeology Data Service, University of York (hereafter ADS). The images and report are therefore now accessible publicly through the ADS (Motley 2022).

The methodologies for the watching brief were to record any archaeological features revealed with the level of recording being appropriate to the character and/or importance of the archaeological remains (Motley and Sturgess 2021, p. 47). Site drawings (plans and sections) would be made by pencil (4H) on drafting film and all drawings would include standard information such as: site details, personnel, date, scale, north-point (Motley and Sturgess 2021, p. 47). All features and finds would be accurately located at an appropriate scale (Motley and Sturgess 2021, p. 47). All archaeological contexts would be described to a standard format linked to a continuous numbering sequence (Motley and Sturgess 2021, p. 47). The photographic recording comprised digital colour photography. The photographs were to include a record of any significant features and also general working shots. If appropriate a metric scale, site and context identifier, and a north arrow would be included in all record shots (Motley and Sturgess 2021, p. 47-48).

The methods that were to be theoretically employed to meet the objectives of the project were appropriate. However, these methods in fact not required or utilised due to the nature of the site. No archaeological features were encountered during the watching brief, with the deepest extent of the excavation still encountering modern plastic in the ground, indicating that the ground had all been disturbed previously, perhaps during the renovations to the house in the 1970s. A small quantity of 19th/20th century ceramic was encountered but not retained. The only data that was collected at this stage of the project were photographs of the full extent of the excavation.

The historic building recording was the main exercise in data collection of this project and included collection of data during the demolition of the building, which is not a practice that is usually undertaken in such projects. As stated, this provided the opportunity to collect additional data about the building which was disseminated via the report. The photogrammetry that was undertaken essentially created a 3D record of the building before it was demolished. This data is, however, at the time of writing, inaccessible to the public. Had the foresight been made to include photogrammetry in the initial WSI methodology, provision could have been made in the project budget to finalise the model and make it publicly available by archiving it with the ADS and uploading it to a website such as Sketchfab (2023). While not required, the methods set out for collecting data on features and deposits were reasonable and appropriate, adhering to ClfA standards (2014b-e). The watching brief stage was less effective at collecting data, particularly with regards to finds. The methods stated for the recovery of finds were that in the event that objects containing precious metal(s) were encountered, the coroner would be informed as per the provisions of the Treasure Act 1996. Any significant finds in stratified contexts would be plotted on a scaled base plan or located with a Leica GPS unit and recorded as small finds (Motley and Sturgess 2021, p. 47). Importantly, the methodology stated that all finds would be “collected in sealable plastic bags, labelled immediately with the site code, context number or other identifier, along with the type of material, and the finder’s initials” (Motley and Sturgess 2021, p. 47). The only exception to this policy was to be that large assemblages of modern (post-1800) material would be representatively sampled. The methodology stated that modern (post-1800) finds could be disposed of at the cataloguing stage (Motley and Sturgess 2021, p. 47).

The ceramic finds were not photographed, catalogued or located on a plan, leaving the nature of the items open to interpretation and their significance unknown. There is no catalogue of finds provided in the report to give any indication of the quantity or nature of what was found. The location from

which the pottery was collected was not indicated anywhere in the report. Ideally, the finds should have been collected, photographed and listed in the report, even if they were to be disposed of, and their location marked on a plan, as the nature of the finds and their situation could have led to a more comprehensive understanding of the site's use. Therefore the methods employed for the collection and cataloguing of finds was not appropriate or effective.

The collection of this data had a significant impact because it was the first and last record of a building that had been forgotten and has now been lost to development. Had the recording work not been undertaken then the building would have been assumed to be a miner's cottage. The work revealed that the house may have predated the mining activity in the area and that it was lived in by a miner at a later date. The academic community has benefited from the production of this data as the information from the site has been entered into the ADS database, and therefore the information can be searched for and included in larger comparative research. The data is tagged with keywords from the FISH thesaurus of terminologies (Forum on Information Standards in Heritage 2021), allowing for further collation.

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