

# Marhamchurch

## Conservation Area Character Statement



(front cover)

*St. Marwenne's Church is the dominant feature of the village, visible as a landmark on the skyline from many miles around. In front of the church the granite war memorial in the form of a Celtic cross is the focal point of an open space which serves as a car park and bus waiting area.*

## INTRODUCTION

Conservation Areas are designated by local planning authorities under the Planning Acts. Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 defines a Conservation Area as *an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*. North Cornwall District Council, as the local planning authority, has a duty to designate appropriate parts of its area as Conservation Areas. At present there are some 8,500 Conservation Areas in England of which 29 are in the district of North Cornwall. During the preparation of the North Cornwall District Local Plan the centre of Marhamchurch was identified as a potential Conservation Area. Following public consultation it was designated as a Conservation Area by North Cornwall District Council on 3 February 1997.

### The Village of Marhamchurch

Marhamchurch is a ridgetop settlement situated about 1.5 km (1 mile) south-west of Bude. It lies just off the A39, close to Helebridge, on the line of the old Bude Canal. St. Marwenne's Church is the dominant feature of the village, visible from some distance. The main street is a broad open space extending eastward from the church.

'Marhamchurch' is a derivative of "Marwenne's Church". The name may stem from the Celtic Saint Marwenne, a daughter of King Brychan of Brecknock (Powys), one of many missionaries travelling to Cornwall from Ireland and South Wales at this time. An alternative source may be the English Saint Merwenn, the 10th century abbess of Romsey in Hampshire.

Today the village is large in size and continuing to grow. There have been recent housing developments to the north and west of the centre and the village enjoys a good range of facilities including a primary school and playing field, the Bray Institute, a hotel and a general store/post office. There is a daily bus service to nearby towns.

*Close by the church are some of the oldest cottages in the village, dating back to the 17th century. They are constructed of cob with thatched roofs and small casement windows. At the centre, Little House was extensively rebuilt in the early 19th century, and raised to two storeys with a slated roof and sliding sash windows.*





## Conservation Area Boundary

The Conservation Area boundary has been drawn to encompass the historic core of the village around St. Marwenne's Church and the original farmsteads, together with the playing field which is important open area with views to the coast.

*The main street of Marhamchurch is a broad open space with relatively few trees. The lack of vegetation is a direct result of the village's exposed ridgetop location.*

The purpose of this statement is threefold:

- to analyse the special character and appearance of Marhamchurch
- to outline the planning policies and controls applying to the Conservation Area
- to identify opportunities for enhancement

## THE CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

### Historical Context

Like the neighbouring historic villages of Kilkhampton and Week St. Mary, Marhamchurch developed as a ridgetop settlement. According to tradition, St. Marwenne arrived towards the end of the 5th century, establishing a hermitage on the site of the present War Memorial, just to the east of the church. Other saintly offspring of King Brychan, such as St. Tetha and St. Morwenna, also gave their names to villages in the district.

During the 'Dark Ages' of the 5th to the 9th centuries, the village was in a frontier zone between spheres of Celtic and Saxon influence. This is reflected by farm names in the parish - Woodknowle, Rattenbury and Creathorne are of Saxon derivation, while a few kilometres southward the names are Celtic in origin e.g. Penhalt, Trevisick and Treskinnick. Marhamchurch and Whalesborough (just to the west) are both situated in good defensive positions on high ground, overlooking the river valley which

probably formed the frontier. By the end of the period the area was effectively under Saxon control.

Following the Norman Conquest, villages such as Marhamchurch were consolidated and re-organised during a period of vigorous colonisation. The village is registered in the Domesday Book as Mar-om-cerch and the manor was granted to Robert of Mortain, created Earl of Cornwall by William I. The existence of a medieval Manor House has been recorded in the vicinity of Court Farm. St. Marwenne's Church was probably rebuilt by the Normans to a cruciform plan, but of this nothing is now visible. The oldest parts of the existing church date from the next phase of rebuilding in the 14th century, but it is likely that the south and east walls of the chancel and the south wall of the nave and transept stand on earlier foundations.

No other buildings of similar antiquity survive. However, some older buildings such as the Rectory and Rosamund Cottage have evidence of early cores dating to at least the seventeenth century, a period of substantial domestic rebuilding throughout much of England.

Along the northern edge of the Conservation Area, the Bude Canal is a significant feature of industrial archaeological interest. This was completed in 1825 and ran from Launceston to the sea lock at Bude. It was used mostly to transport sea sand and lime for use as fertiliser by local farms and continued in operation until 1901, when competition from the railway finally forced its closure. The line of the canal is visible as a curved boundary and is evidenced by house names such as "Canal Lodge". Nearby, at Helebridge, are the remnants of an inclined plane which was used to winch tub boats between the canal's upper section and the lower Bude reach. The railway line, now also disused, ran south of Marhamchurch. It was built by the London and South-West Railway, which opened a service from Waterloo to Bude in 1898.

*Two Methodist chapels are situated in Pinch Hill. Their differing forms styles illustrate how the Gothic style became more popular towards the end of the 19th century. The mid-19th century Sunday School is a simple hall, rendered with round headed windows and classical quoins. The later Methodist Church, built in 1905 of stone with pale brick dressings, has tall Gothic windows and a steeply pitched roof.*





Methodist chapels were established in Marhamchurch during the 19th century. A Wesleyan chapel at the east end of the village has now been converted to houses (Kirkstone and Churston). The former Bible Christian Chapel and Sunday School in Pinch Hill is now the Methodist Church for the whole village.

*On the main street are several double fronted stone houses built during the mid-19th century. Slated roofs, brick chimneys and dressings, panelled front doors and small-paned timber sliding sash windows are typical features.*

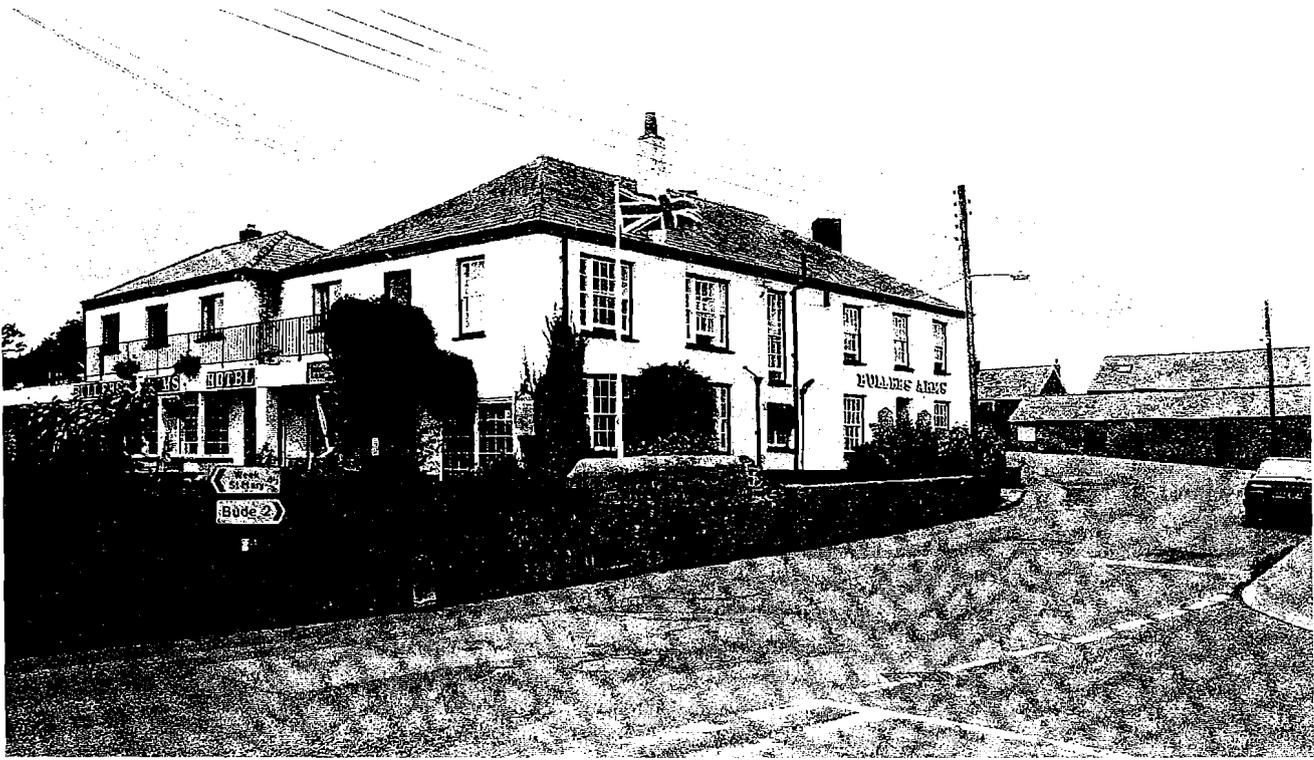
## The Present Character and Appearance of the Village

Marhamchurch is located on the western edge of a large undulating plateau formed by the Culm Measures. The scouring effect of the prevailing wind is very apparent, accounting for the contrast between the open plateau and the more thickly vegetated, sheltered valleys. In exposed places, all the hedgerow trees lean north-eastward, their canopies sculptured and streamlined by the prevailing winds.

The village straddles a hog's back-like spur from which there are panoramic vistas of the surrounding countryside and the Atlantic Ocean beyond. Due to its position on the ridgetop, St. Marwenne's Church forms a prominent landmark, visible almost as a beacon from many miles around. To the south, the tower of Week St. Mary Church can be seen. The prominence of the church towers in the landscape is a reminder of the defensive role of these former frontier settlements.

As an aid to understanding, the village is analysed in more detail below, from west to east in the following order:

- *Approach from the west*
- *The Village Centre*
- *Hobbacott Lane*



*The black and white colour scheme of The Bullers Arms is a common feature of Marhamchurch and other nearby villages such as Week St. Mary. The building is Georgian in origin with a mitred hipped slate roof over the oldest part.*

### ***Approach from the west:***

The principal approach to Marhamchurch is from the A39 at Helebridge. A track follows the line of the former inclined plane of the canal passing by the old Box's Foundry, whilst the road climbs uphill past the late 19th and 20th century houses. As it approaches the brow of the hill, St. Marwenne's church tower can be seen above the rooftops. Where the road levels, the scene begins to open out. On the north side is the new primary school, set in open ground behind a new stone faced bank. Opposite, Penhele is a tall late 19th century house built on glebe land. It is constructed of stone with yellow brick quoins, arched window surrounds and partial slate hanging. The roof is of regular sized slate, finished with crested terra cotta ridge tiles.

### ***The Village Centre:***

Immediately to the east is the landmark feature of St. Marwenne's Church, situated at one end of the village centre. The incremental nature of the church's construction and its somewhat irregular form contribute considerably to its character. It is built of stone rubble with granite and greenstone dressings and a pinnacled, battlemented tower. The entrance to the small churchyard is along a cobbled path through a lych gate at its east end, from where there are fine views to the south-west. There is a cluster of horse chestnut and ash trees in the churchyard but they are generally in poor condition - the exposed position of the village tends to hinder substantial tree growth. Inside the church there are many important historical fixtures and fittings including a window dating to 1403, which was originally part of the anchorite Cecilia Moys' cell.

Opposite the church are several altered cottages, a modern house, and the Old School, a single storey building of roughly coursed stone with granite and brick dressings, dated 1873. A footpath leads to the 'Revel Field' - playing fields

which border the line of the Bude Canal. From here there are panoramic views northward towards Bude and beyond to cliffs at Morwenstow.

At the east end of the churchyard the main street widens out into an elongated space with a granite War Memorial in the form of a Celtic cross at its centre. The area around the War Memorial is surfaced in plain tarmac and used for communal car parking. A simple bus shelter and wooden benches are positioned along the churchyard wall beside the lych gate. The broad street area lends the centre of the village a feeling of spaciousness, with just a few trees in the garden areas fronting it. In adverse weather conditions the space is exposed and windswept.

Some of the oldest cottages in Marhamchurch are to be found close by the church. They are mostly of rendered cob or rubble construction, three with thatched roofs. Rose Cottage is just outside the lych gate. Across on the north-west corner of Pinch Hill, the varied group comprising Little House, Old Post Office and Rosamund dates back to the 17th century.

Pinch Hill leads downhill across the line of the Bude Canal towards the old Rectory. There are views out of the village northward but in general the lane feels more enclosed than the village centre. On its west side is the former Bible Christian Chapel and Sunday School, now the Methodist Church. The main church is a Gothic style building in stone with yellow brick quoins and window surrounds, dated 1905. The earlier Sunday School building is a simple hall, rendered with round headed windows. Both are slated.

On the north-east corner of Pinch Hill and the main street, the Bray Church of England Institute forms a strong feature. It is distinctive building in Arts and Crafts idiom, with Tudoresque detailing. It is constructed of stone,

*It is believed that a manor house previously existed in the vicinity of Court Farm. The present house is of 19th century appearance but may incorporate elements of an earlier building.*



with decorative granite features and window surrounds, dated 1913. Immediately beyond is a small development of new houses.

On the south side of the main street are several substantial double fronted stone houses, mostly of 19th century build. These form the backbone of the village centre and include the Post Office/store, a natural focal point for both local residents and visitors. These properties are set well forward on their plots, with narrow front gardens behind waist-height local stone walls. Large back gardens with some mature trees extend down to Underlane which loops along the rear boundaries, emerging beside the Bullers Arms Hotel. The lane is narrow and enclosed with hedges and trees fronting it. There is planning permission for new development in part of the rear garden areas which would be accessed from the lane.

The Bullers Arms Hotel is a significant resource for both residents and visitors - a public house, hotel and conference centre. This building has early roots and its core is Georgian in style, but it has been progressively altered and extended. A large open car park has been laid out at the rear.

At the north-east end of the main street is Court Farm, a long two storey stone farmhouse with wide six pane sash windows and a modern projecting entrance porch. It is set back in an ornamental garden on the site of, and possibly incorporating remains of, the original Manor House. The farm outbuildings alongside have been sensitively converted into holiday accommodation. There is planning permission for further development to the north-east of the farm, immediately adjoining the Conservation Area.

### ***Hobbacott Lane:***

Beyond Court Farm most houses front onto the pavement, and the street narrows where it turns into Hobbacott Lane, giving a greater sense of intimacy. From Aboukir onward the double fronted stone houses of the village centre give way to less formal cottages of stone or cob, often rendered. Some have been altered with consequent loss of character. At The Haven imitation leaded lights have been installed. Village Farm has a non-typical brown colour scheme with pebbledashed walls and new windows. In this area cottage names are indicative of their former uses - Wheelwright's Cottage, The Old Bakery etc. Chapel View points the way across the lane to the former Wesleyan Chapel, now converted to two houses - Kirkstone and Churston. The tall gabled roof and apse at the south end give clues as to its previous function.

There are fewer general views out of the area at the east end of the village centre, other than from beside the Bullers Arms. Nevertheless there remains a general consciousness of the elevation of the village with slot views outward between buildings.

### **Building Materials**

Walls are constructed of local stone or cob. On larger buildings stone surfaces may remain in their natural state; otherwise most smaller cottages are rendered or painted, usually white with black plinths. Some walls are slate hung.



*The taller stone houses of the main street give way to lower cottages on the corner of Hobbacott Lane. Rendered walls and simple casement windows are traditional features, but some properties have been altered with consequent loss of character - imitation leaded lights and shutters are untypical details, for example.*

Roofs are mostly slated too, often with Delabole rag slate. Chimneys are generally brick. Slate is also used on porch roofs which are varied in style.

A few cottages are thatched in traditional local combed wheat reed. The occasional water reed thatch is not typical of the area.

Windows are mostly small pane casements on the cottages and vertical sliding sash on the larger properties such as Penhele, Court Farm, The Bullers Arms and the larger stone houses on the south side of the main street. Window frames and sills are often black with white painted sashes.

Boundary treatments make use of traditional materials too. On the main street some houses retain wrought iron railings. There are also low local stone walls. Some cobbled paving survives - in front of the church and down towards Church Cottage (now partly covered), also in front of Aboukir House.

## PLANNING POLICIES AND CONTROLS

All planning authorities are required by Sections 71 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to *pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of Conservation Areas*. Local planning authorities - in this case North Cornwall District Council - have a duty to *formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are Conservation Areas*. This statement seeks to respond to that statutory duty.

Guidance on planning policies in Conservation Areas is provided at a variety of levels. Government guidelines are given in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 *Planning and the Historic Environment* (PPG15). English Heritage also publishes advisory leaflets. At county level, the Cornwall Structure Plan provides a strategic policy framework in its Countryside and Built Environment chapter. At local level the North Cornwall District Local Plan forms the basis for planning decisions. The policies contained in the *The Historic Environment* section of its Environment chapter are particularly relevant. Supplementary planning guidance is provided by this Character Statement and by the North Cornwall Design Guide.

Marhamchurch is also subject to particular policies which are described in more detail in the North Cornwall District Local Plan. It has been identified as a main village able to accommodate some additional residential development, mostly outside the Conservation Area, but also behind Court Farm and on the north side of Underlane. The line of the Bude canal is protected from development in order to safeguard the resource and the opportunities for a recreational trail.

Owners of property within the Conservation Area should be aware that the designation of a Conservation Area automatically brings into effect additional planning controls and considerations which include:

- The demolition of buildings is not permitted except with the prior consent of the District Council.
- Tighter limits on 'permitted development' allowances.
- Restrictions on felling and other tree work. Owners must give 6 weeks notice to the District Council of proposed work to trees. Important hedges and trees are shown on the accompanying character map.
- The District Council must publicise development proposals.
- A presumption that new development should preserve or enhance the character of the area.
- Outline planning applications will not be accepted.

The provision of substitute windows, doors and materials to walls and roofs has occurred in some cases but the overall character of the village is as yet largely unspoiled. The future use of PVCu, or other inappropriate window, door or wall styles or materials is discouraged. This includes the use of manufactured slates or tiles on roofs or as cladding. As a general rule repair rather than replacement is preferred. Where repairs are necessary the use of traditional materials and styles which maintain the architectural detailing of the Conservation Area is recommended. A particular opportunity exists to encourage the reinstatement of traditional stone walls. The North Cornwall Design Guide gives further details.

### **Listed Buildings**

Some buildings are listed by the Secretary of State as being of special architectural or historic interest in their own right. The interiors and exteriors of these buildings are protected by law and prior listed building consent is usually necessary from the District Council before any works of alteration, demolition or extension can be carried out. Such works could include re-roofing, rendering or painting walls, the alteration of doors and windows, replacing rainwater goods, the removal of internal fixtures or structural changes. Permission is also required for the erection of small buildings such as garden sheds within the grounds of a listed building, or for changes to gates, fences or walls enclosing it.

Buildings in Marhamchurch which are listed as being of special architectural or historic interest are shown on the accompanying character map.

## AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR ENHANCEMENT WITHIN THE CONSERVATION AREA

There are some features of Marhamchurch Conservation Area where there is scope for enhancement work. Responsibility rests with both private owners and public bodies. The suggestions below have been identified in conjunction with local people and are set out for consideration as opportunities arise. The District Council will take the lead in encouraging their implementation.

- The co-operation of statutory undertakers will be sought to reduce the impact of overhead lines.
- Trees in the core of the village are sparse and poorly formed. Planting schemes of appropriate indigenous species could help to reinforce tree clusters in the village centre.
- Some rearrangement of car parking around the War Memorial with appropriate surface treatment and street furniture could render this space more attractive as an informal sitting out area.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Documents and policies referred to above include:

Department of the Environment/Department of National Heritage,  
PPG 15 : *Planning Policy Guidance: Planning and the Historic Environment*, HMSO 1994

English Heritage, *Conservation Area Practice*, October 1995

English Heritage, *Development in the Historic Environment*, June 1995

Cornwall County Council, *Cornwall Structure Plan*

North Cornwall District Council, *North Cornwall District Local Plan*

North Cornwall District Council, *North Cornwall Design Guide*

*Lake's Parochial History of the County of Cornwall*, Vols. 1-4, 1867-72

O. J. Padel, *Cornish Place Names*, 1988

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