

St Breock

Conservation Area Character Statement



(front cover)

St. Breock takes its name from a 6th century Celtic saint. The parish church is largely hidden from view in a steep sided valley, surrounded by trees. The present building dates from the 13th century but has been rebuilt and restored several times, partly as a result of flooding.

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 St. Breock 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 Hamlet of St. Breock

The hamlet of St. Breock is located 1½ km (1 mile) south-west of Wadebridge at the convergence of three narrow minor roads from the Royal Cornwall Showground, Wadebridge and Burlawn. It is a quiet and hidden place, situated at the margin of a small steep wooded valley and open downland above. The surrounding land remains primarily in agricultural use; this is reflected in the historical division of land use within the hamlet - the valley houses the ancient Parish Church whilst the common above formed the focus of the working village adjacent to the downs.

St. Breock, which literally means "speckled" or tartan-clad, is named for the Celtic saint of the same name to whom the church was dedicated in 1259. Earlier names for the settlement are those such as 'Lansant' or 'Nansant', generally meaning 'holy valley' or 'valley of the saint(s)' - probably dating back to the 6th century.

Today St. Breock is a very quiet hamlet, with just a few dozen permanent residents. Several properties are used for holiday accommodation and one group of buildings has been converted for use as an antiques gallery.

Conservation Area Boundary

The Conservation Area Boundary has been drawn to encompass the historic core of the hamlet around the common together with the Parish Church and its immediate valley setting.



The tiny village clusters around the common at the top of the bridle path leading up from the church. The small scale cottages are built of local stone rubble with rag slate roofs and simple timber sash or casement windows. Some date back to the 16th century.

The purpose of this statement is threefold:

- to analyse the special character and appearance of St Breock
- 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

The downland around St. Breock has evidence of settlement going back to the Neolithic period. St. Breock hamlet's origins are linked more particularly to the Celtic monastic missionary movement of the 6th century. St. Breock himself was brought up in Dyfed (Cardiganshire) and educated in Paris. He was most active in Brittany where he founded an important monastery at St. Brieuc. It is believed that he landed in Wadebridge en route to Brittany around 520 A.D. Certainly St. Breock lies close to traditional monastic migratory routes from South Wales across Cornwall to Brittany. An inscribed stone of this period is located a short distance to the south-west at Nanscove and nearby Pawton was held by the monastery of St. Petroc's in Padstow until around 835 A.D.

During the Medieval period Pawton Manor was important as one of the Bishop of Exeter's residences during visits to Cornwall - it was here that Bishop Bronescombe stayed in 1259 when he dedicated the church to St. Breock. St. Breock functioned as the mother church for Wadebridge which by 1300 was developing significantly. Many of the historic tombs in the churchyard are those of Wadebridge residents.

Surviving domestic buildings are more recent in origin. St. Breock Place, formerly the Rectory, dates back to the late 17th century. The oldest cottages by the common may have 16th century origins. Other buildings, now in domestic use, formerly had other functions when the hamlet had a much larger population. Next to the church, Chanters was the local inn - Farmers Inn. Behind Couch's Cottage on the Wadebridge road is a low rendered shed which used to be the communal wash house for all the other cottages on the common. The small building behind the wash house was a cobbler's shop and the land opposite Burrow Cot and Endicot was a shared allotment/orchard. In the 20th century the population has contracted considerably and there has been little recent change.

The Present Character and Appearance of St. Breock

As an aid to understanding, St. Breock is analysed in more detail below, in two sections:

- *The Village*
- *The Church*

The Village:

St. Breock is well hidden and routes to it give little warning of arrival, other than the gateway to the Church of St. Breoke off the Burlawn road. On the final approaches

On the west side of the common, St. Breock Place is a large stone house which was formerly The Rectory. Though the principal elevation has a Georgian appearance, the structure of the house is considerably older and contains many original interior carpentry and joinery details.



to the village the Burlawn and Royal Cornwall Showground roads cut through sections of bedrock, giving a pronounced sense of enclosure. On the Showground road this feeling is reinforced by the walled gardens of the antiques gallery and St. Breock Place.

The scene opens out only at the very centre where the roads meet the steep bridle path coming up from the church. They converge at the common, a small grass triangle on a terrace near the top of the steep south-facing valley slope. This is the focal point of the hamlet, flanked by the garden wall of St. Breock Place to the west, and overlooked by a group of cottages on its north-east side. To the south of the common, the land drops steeply away down the path to the church and there is a significant view across the valley towards Nanscow and St. Breock Downs. A prominent modern feature in this view is the wind farm on the skyline.

St. Breock's Place, formerly The Rectory, is the largest building in the village. It is a large, fine Georgian fronted building which contains many original features. The house is positioned in a parkland setting of oaks and evergreen oaks behind stone garden walls and gate piers. Together with its associated outbuildings, the complex forms a major feature within the Conservation Area.

In contrast to St. Breock's Place, the terraces of two-storey cottages abutting the common on the north-east side are small and modest in style and character. The buildings link together to form a rambling L-shape, presenting a mixture of textures and materials. Further along the Wadebridge road the small cottage "Nancient" is an older style colourwashed cottage of stone and possibly cob walls. The proximity of the newer dwelling adjacent, "Nanscent", overshadows "Nancient" both in scale and character. Landscape elements here reflect the former working nature of the village - an old communal allotment, small cottage gardens and an orchard. Two large beech trees mark the margin of the village before the scene changes to open farmland beyond.

The Church:

South of the common a very steep bridle path descends to the Parish Church. On its east side is the new graveyard; on the west a small group of cottages clings

to the slope halfway down the path. The path enters the churchyard by way of an unroofed early 19th century wrought iron lych gate. A granite coffin rest is situated immediately inside the gate. Slate steps lead down to a bridge across the stream.

At the bottom of the valley by the stream is the Parish Church, in a concealed location largely hidden amongst trees. Though the church is not architecturally imposing in terms of its position, it is of historical interest. The existing structure dates back to the 13th century, but like many other churches in the area, it was rebuilt in the 15th century when the south aisle and upper part of the tower was added. The battlemented tower is relatively squat in form. Further extensive restoration work was carried out in 1881 and 1966 following flooding.

The valley around the church is a tight 'V' shape with a strong sense of enclosure. It is filled with mature broadleaf trees which are park-like in planting and scale - beech, copper beech, ash, sycamore and oak, plus traditional churchyard yews. The old graveyard around the church includes many fine slate memorials. At the east end of the churchyard, Tredinnick Cottage nestles in a secluded position.



Endicot is probably of 17th century origin, built of cob and rubble stone. The hipped roof is covered in large rag slates, with red clay ridge tiles and mitred hip joints. The gable end of the next door cottage is finished with a traditional wind spur course of slates at the verge.

Building Materials

Most buildings are constructed of local stone rubble, with lime mortar pointing. Some are rendered and colourwashed. Roofs are mostly of rag slate with slate verges, brick chimneys and slate weatherings. Glebe House and the cottage adjacent have asbestos cement roofs. Glebe House has flat brick arches and some brick reveals. Most of the cottages have traditional painted timber casement or sash windows but there are a few modern replacements.

Boundary walls are constructed of random rubble stone, sometimes rendered and painted, with stone copings.

St. Breock Place has random rubble walling with brick arched lintels, a slate roof with matching plain ridge tiles and brick chimneys. Windows are 12 pane sashes. There are granite gate piers and boundary walls.

The church is of random rubble and slate construction.

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.

St Breock is also subject to particular policies which are described in more detail in the North Cornwall District Local Plan. The settlement is not designated for any further development. The valley of the brook to the east of the church is a Cornwall Nature Conservation Site.

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. This is considered to be detrimental to the character of the Conservation Area. 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. 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 St. Breock 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 St. Breock 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 triangular common with its bench seat is an important open space. However, car parking on its margins is causing erosion. Some granite boulders, or other low-key profiling could be used to redefine the boundary between highway and amenity space.
- The co-operation of statutory undertakers will be sought to reduce the impact of overhead lines.

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*

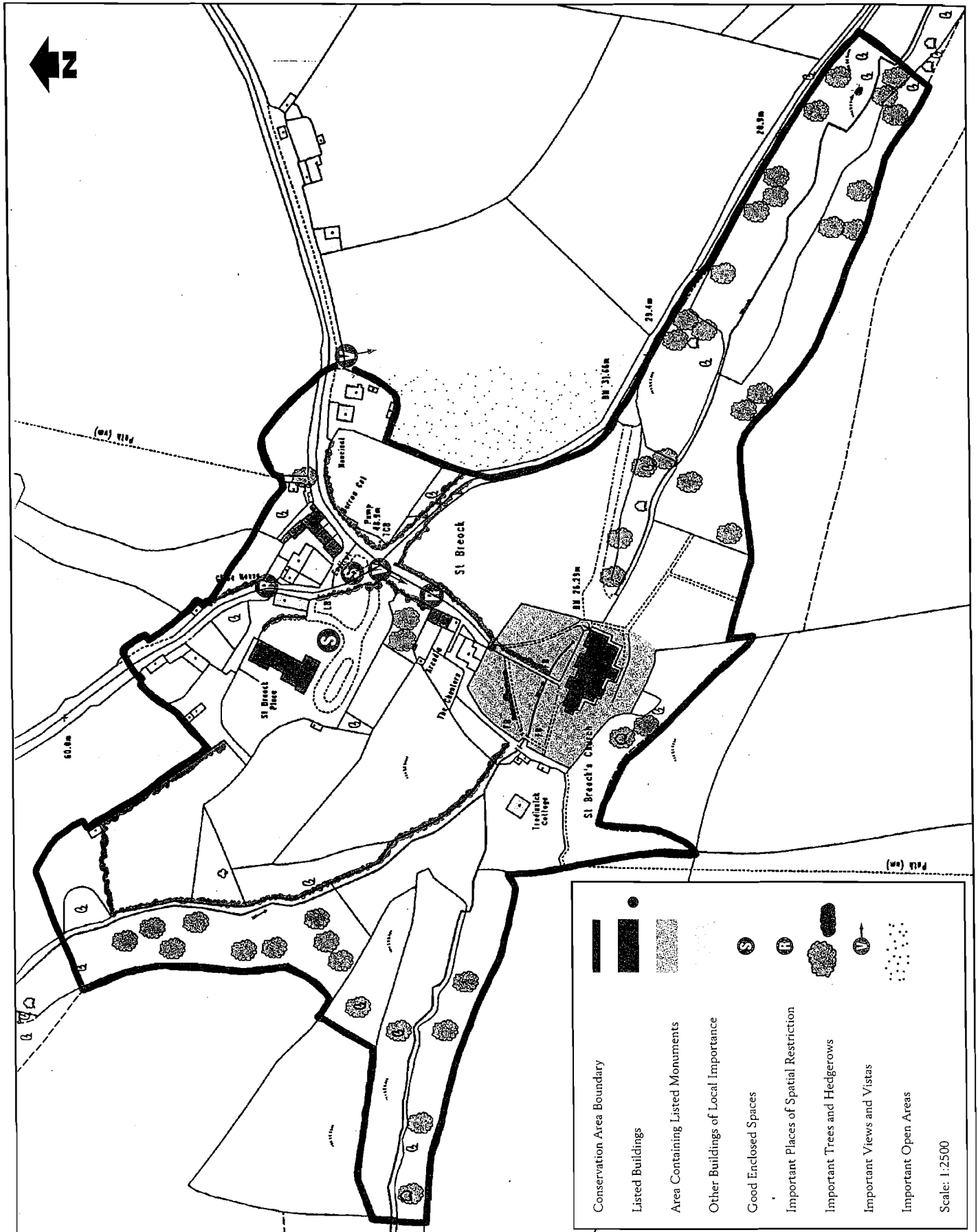
Lake's Parochial History of the County of Cornwall, Vols. 1-4, 1867-72

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

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ST BREOCK CONSERVATION AREA



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