

# Week St Mary

## Conservation Area Character Statement



(front cover)

*Behind a stone wall, set at right angles to the street, the house at the Old College survives from a larger complex, built in 1508 as a grammar school. It is constructed of Polyphant stone with granite dressings and a rag slate roof. The College is now in the care of the Landmark Trust.*

## 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 Week St. Mary 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 Week St. Mary

Week St. Mary is straggling linear settlement situated about 11 km (7 miles) south-west of Bude on a ridgetop amidst hilly farmland. It is in a relatively remote location, accessed by narrow country lanes leading from the A39 Bude-Wadebridge road and the B3254 Stratton-Launceston route.

'Week' is derived from the Anglo Saxon word 'wic', indicative of a dwelling, dairy farm or village. The village is recorded in the Domesday Book and it is suggested that 'St. Mary' (the patron saint of the church) was subsequently appended to the name to distinguish the parish from Pancrasweek and Germansweek in Devon. It was originally called St. Mary Week. The village was more important in the past than its present appearance suggests and had the status of a borough in the Medieval period.

Today Week St. Mary is a medium sized village experiencing some growth. Although there is no longer a local school, there is a reasonable range of facilities - a post office/general store, an electrical shop, a gallery, a public house (in Week Green), a garage, two churches, village hall and holiday complex.

### Conservation Area Boundary

The Conservation Area boundary has been drawn to encompass the historic core of the village around St. Mary's Church, Lower Square and The Square. It extends southward to include the Methodist Church, the old and new rectories and their grounds, particularly the high hedgerow and mature trees along the road side. To the east and west it includes the historic landscape of strip fields associated with burgage plots, which are a distinctive element in the setting of the village. Their form is particularly apparent from maps and aerial photographs. To the south, Week Green is somewhat detached from the historic core and is not included in the Conservation Area.

The purpose of this statement is threefold:

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



*The Square, part of the old market place, is the principal focal point of Week St. Mary. On the left, Clifton is the only thatched property remaining in the village, although there is evidence that other cottages were originally thatched too. The angular treatment of the dormers at Clifton is reflective of East Anglian water reed thatching styles rather than the more rounded shapes of wheat straw thatches usually found in east Cornwall and west Devon.*

## THE CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

### Historical Context

Week St. Mary is located on high ground in an area where there is evidence of prehistoric settlement - for example nearby Ashbury Camp. Other old villages in the area such as Kilkhampton and Marhamchurch also have elevated sites. Week St. Mary was in existence by the time of the Norman Conquest and is recorded in the Domesday Book as the relatively small settlement of 'Wich'. This manor was granted to Richard Fitz Tuold, steward of the Earl of Cornwall, Robert of Mortain, a half brother of William I. The ridgetop site provided a good defensive position facing north and west, and a castle was built, probably during the 11th or 12th century. This was the manorial centre. Under the shelter of the castle a chapel was established - first documented in 1171. In the 13th century it was rebuilt and subsequently extended in the 14th and 15th centuries to form the present Parish Church of St. Mary.

The extension of the church reflects the growth of Week St. Mary from village to thriving market town which had achieved borough status by the mid-14th century. A large market place was laid out in the triangular area to the east of the castle, probably enclosing the church and covering The Square and Lower Square. A market house existed on the grassed area in front of Red Lion House, in Lower Square. Houses were built on burgage plots around the perimeter of the market place, each with a cultivable area of land of about one acre extending away to the rear. These are the characteristic strip fields still clearly preserved in the landscape, especially to the east and south-west of the village centre. Their intact and relatively undivided nature probably reflects the fact that the town never grew much beyond the 30-40 burgages provided for. Lower Square and The Square are vestiges of the former large open market area, which was progressively infilled by later buildings.

To the east of the churchyard is the old College of Week St. Mary. This was founded by Dame Thomasine Percival, born Thomasine Bonaventure in Week St. Mary around 1440. By 1508, after three prosperous marriages, she was a widow of considerable fortune and bequeathed valuable gifts to a number of churches and monasteries in the vicinity. In Week St. Mary, she endowed a free

Grammar School and chantry. Unfortunately the establishment did not thrive for long; the chantry was suppressed in 1548, and the school was moved to Launceston as Week St. Mary was deemed to be too remote for its continuation.

The village's importance declined in the post-Reformation period. During the Civil War, when Royalist troops gathered before the battle of Stratton, it was described as a poor place, unable to supply provisions in any quantity.

In the 18th century, John Wesley was welcomed into the parish by the Rector on several occasions where he preached in St. Mary's Church to large congregations. The present Methodist church was built in 1888. An extensive restoration was carried out to the Parish Church from 1876-81.



*Burdenwell is an old manor house. Its plan form is typical of simple 17th century houses - a single room in depth, with a room on each side of a cross passage which contains a newel staircase. The 2 - storey porch was a fashionable feature of the time.*

## The Present Character and Appearance of the Village

Week St. Mary is situated high up on rolling hills on an area of flat ground in a relatively exposed and windswept location. This is heralded by the approaches to the village, especially from the north and west, through narrow lanes climbing progressively upward between high hedgerows. The tower of St. Mary's Church is visible for some distance. Approaches from the south lead through Week Green and then descend directly to the centre, with the church as a landmark. However, the route in from the north and west past the Village Hall arrives somewhat confusingly at a T-junction backed by outbuildings, where the way to the centre is not immediately apparent.

This is explained by the sprawling linear form of the village, with two principal historic foci - Lower Square in the north, and The Square, at the centre. St. Mary's Church and the castle mound lie immediately to the west. Most shops and amenities are grouped loosely in the centre, around The Square. The exception is the village pub which is at Week Green.

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

- *Lower Square*
- *The Square*
- *South from The Square*

### *Lower Square:*

Narrow lanes from Whitstone and Marhamchurch to the north rise steeply past Stewarts Farm and Stewarts Road cottages into Lower Square. This triangular area was formerly the hub of the market place but is now essentially a quiet residential area of larger houses with a working farm at its east end. The open space was probably originally larger, and the buildings around its perimeter are mostly of 19th and 20th century appearance, varying in style and form. Several houses are of stone and there is a sense of solidity and substance.

At the entry point to the square is Red Lion House, a white rendered building, formerly an inn. The open grassed area opposite was the site of the ancient Market House, although no remains of it are visible above ground. On the south-east side, New House was also previously an inn. The design of Penrowan, the adjoining modern house, successfully echoes traditional building themes and materials - gabled dormers, slate roof, rendered surfaces and a black and white colour scheme. East of Lower Square, tucked away down a track, Burdenwell Manor is a much older building dating back to the 16th century, and once owned by the Granville family.

From Lower Square looking north past Red Lion House are views towards Stratton; behind Box Tree Cottage St. Mary's Church tower rises up above the trees, but the main part of the building is not immediately visible. A kissing gate leads into the north end of the churchyard, a neatly kept area with modern asphalt footpaths.

At the south end of Lower Square the street narrows. On the east side is an important group of buildings associated with Thomasine Percival's Grammar School. The College, also known as The Old College, is set facing a courtyard with its long axis at right angles to the street, behind a battlemented wall. It is constructed of polyphant ashlar with granite dressings and a slated roof. Through the wooden gate the main entrance is visible, a four-centred arched granite doorway with a heraldic shield carved in the tympanum above. Parts of the 1508 college complex are also incorporated into the later adjoining buildings at New College and Hayescroft which are similarly constructed of polyphant and granite.

Behind The College, a typical burgage plot in the form of a long strip meadow slopes away down the valley. There is a fine slot view across the courtyard and beyond the wellhouse towards a patchwork of fields extending all the way to distant Dartmoor. Similar views are to be found from various points all along the east side of the main street in Week St. Mary.

Opposite the Grammar School, Church Cottage and Fuchsia Cottage are simple cottage buildings of cob and stone, dating back to the 17th century. Their steep gabled roof was originally thatched, but is currently covered in corrugated asbestos.

The road linking Lower Square and The Square is constrained with a feeling of intimacy as the cottages front directly onto the road. Private strips of space between the cottages are demarcated by the use of tubs, home-made concrete kerbing etc.



## *The Square:*

The road from Lower Square leads southward and opens out into The Square. This triangular space is the main focus of activity with the post office, Treetops holiday complex and the Parish Church all positioned around it or accessed from it. In the centre a granite war memorial in the shape of a Celtic cross forms a focal point, with an informal car parking area surrounding it.

The Square is bounded on its north and west sides by short terraces, small cottages now amalgamated into larger dwellings. The northern terrace, a simple row of 19th century buildings, includes the busy Post Office/stores. New houses directly facing The Square in its north-west corner echo traditional local details such as porches, finishes and colouring. Just behind, the red brick facings of new houses at Oaklands, between The Square and the churchyard, are less characteristic of the area. A parking area is discreetly hidden behind the development and churchyard wall. A windbreak of ornamental trees has been planted adjacent to the church.

*St. Mary's Church occupies a commanding position, the tower visible from many points in and around the village. It was originally a much smaller building and its development mirrors that of many Cornish churches. Of the Norman church nothing remains - the chancel dates from the 13th century. During the late 14th century the south aisle was added and then around 1450 the building was extended to the west and a north aisle constructed. Finally, in about 1500, work began on the tower and a porch was added. The resultant style is mostly perpendicular, subsequently modified by Victorian restoration work.*



On the west side of The Square, the row of houses includes Treetops cottage, which probably dates to at least the 18th century, and Clifton, the only thatched cottage in Week St. Mary. Adjacent to Clifton on the south side is a low rag slated outbuilding. These buildings all face a grassed area which has been planted with ornamental trees and provided with a seat.

On the east side of The Square, a builders yard abuts the former cattle market. The market buildings have been cleared and the site is being redeveloped as 'Market Place' on a gradual basis. In the interim it presents a somewhat unresolved aspect to this side of the The Square and tends to highlight its open and rather windswept nature, with little vegetation. Across the site there are significant views out to the east.

St Mary's Church lies to the north-west of The Square. The main entrance to the churchyard is between Rose Cottage and Oaklands. The church tower is a landmark in the village, but the view of it from The Square is interrupted by overhead cables and their supporting poles. The square tower is a massive 15th century granite structure with carved granite bands and pinnacles. The church is entered through the granite portal of the south porch. Inside, its appearance

is reflective of the comprehensive 19th century restoration, without some of the older and more picturesque features associated with less extensively restored churches in the neighbourhood.

The relatively open and flat churchyard is enclosed by hedgerow windbreaks. It is a tidy and peaceful area containing the few mature trees in the whole centre of the village. Beech and other indigenous trees line the boundaries with Box Tree Cottage and the rear of Church House Cottage.

A stile leads to the site of the castle on a mound to the west of the church, from where there are commanding views to the north and west. The precise extent of the castle compound is uncertain - its bailey (courtyard area) may have extended to the south of the mound into the present area of the Treetops chalets. The whole of this area is of considerable archaeological interest.

### ***South from The Square:***

South from The Square, the buildings along the road to Week Green are varied in age, form and layout. Most are houses; some are in commercial use. The older properties are generally set quite close to the roadside. Minor alterations to these buildings include replacement windows and modern render finishes such as pebbledash.

On the east side of the road are two larger buildings of local importance. The Methodist Church and adjoining Sunday School are rendered late Victorian buildings in Gothic style. Bands of different coloured slates add a distinctive appearance to their roofs. At the bottom of the hill up to Week Green, the old Rectory (Wentworth House) is concealed behind a high wall and Honeysuckle Cottage, part of its former outbuildings. However, between the church and the Rectory, a large new house has been constructed in Tudoresque style. The use of red brick and imitation timber framing here is not at all typical of the village. Between and from the rear of all of these properties, there are panoramic views to the east.

Ascending the hill, the new Rectory is hidden behind a hedgerow with beech and other mature trees. It has been built in the former garden area of the old Rectory where there is a good group of mature trees. The new Rectory is accessed through the Glebe estate.

Behind the buildings on the west side of the road, set up on slightly higher ground, is an open area of strip fields; part of this area backing onto the Village Hall has been allocated for future housing development. The historic field boundaries are an important feature of this site. The western edge of this area is bounded by a green lane running from Week Green to Lambley Park, which is a public footpath.

### **Building Materials**

Buildings are usually two storey, often set close on the roadside. They are usually constructed of random rubble masonry with granite or red brick dressings. Cob is also used for simple buildings. Both are often rendered and/or colour washed. The exposure and altitude of the village may well account for this.

More important buildings are constructed of better quality stone. The College complex, together with New College and Hayescroft, are built with coursed polyphant ashlar with granite lintels, quoins, moulded granite arches, moulded granite caps to chimneys and some granite mullioned windows. St. Mary's Church has a wholly granite tower with random rubble used for the main body of the building.

*Extensive 19th century chapel building in North Cornwall reflects the growth of the non-conformist movement during this period. John Wesley visited Week St. Mary on several occasions between 1745 and 1762 with the encouragement of the local Rector. The present Methodist Church was built as a Bible Christian chapel in 1888 and replaced an earlier building. As is usual, a separate Sunday School is located adjacent to the church.*



Traditional roofing materials are Delabole rag slate or thatch. Old slated roofs usually have toning ridge tiles, sometimes crested. Terracotta ridge tiles tend to be used on roofs laid in the later 19th century, either plain or crested. Regular sized slate is found on later 19th century roofs. Most roofs are gabled; west facing ends may be hipped with mitred details. Small gabled dormers are common. Thatch was usually made of local straw from cereal crops rather than water reed. Church Cottage was previously thatched. Clifton has a thatch of water reed with wedge shaped dormers. Water reed is not typical of this area.

Chimney stacks are generally brick, sometimes built up from earlier stone stacks - some stacks are more decorative e. g. at Red Lion House and Sea View Farm. Angled slates are often used rather than clay chimney pots.

Windows are usually of painted softwood, either sliding sash or casements with slate or granite sills. Box Tree Cottage has a mixture of window type with leaded light windows.

Small porches are common. Some are robust and of painted masonry with pitched gabled roofs. Other are simple angled door hoods. Slate is the usual covering.

Some areas of cobbled paving exist - in front of Fuchsia Cottage (next to Church Cottage), the enclosed area in front of the College and the open area in front of Clifton - the latter being rougher cobbles mixed with slaty bedrock.

## 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.

Week St. Mary is also subject to particular policies which are described in more detail in the North Cornwall District Local Plan. It is set within an Area of Great Landscape Value and has been identified as a main village capable of accommodating some further residential development. Due to its early foundation it has also been designated as a Historic Settlement which highlights the possible need for archaeological investigation prior to any development.

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. Trees around the new Rectory are covered by a Tree Preservation Order.
- 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 Week St. Mary 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 Week St. Mary 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.

- There is some scope to improve the setting of Lower Square by the provision of more sympathetic designs of street lighting and kerbing. Interpretative material could be introduced to explain the former role of this space and indicate the location of the market house.
- The eventual completion of the Market Place development will provide opportunities for enhancing the setting of The Square.
- 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*

Cornwall Archaeology Society, *Cornish Archaeology No. 31*, pp. 143-153, 1992

*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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