

# PLEN-AN-GWARRY ST JUST PENWITH CORNWALL

## REPORT ON REPAIRS TO THE GRANITE STONE FACING

### 1. Background

An application for ancient monument consent was sought for works required to the Plen-an-Gwarry, Bank Square, St Just, Penzance, Cornwall.

The St. Just Plen-an-Gwarry is scheduled as National Monument No. DCO1247 (Cornwall 26. Grid Ref: 137022 031420) and is in the St Just Conservation Area.

A site plan is attached to this report, which marks the locations of the works undertaken in 2011

The Plen-an-Gwarry is owned by St Just-in-Penwith Town Council, having previously been owned by St Just Urban District Council (a letter from the Town Council to Department of Environment dated 17 September 1979 confirms ownership).

The Plen-an-Gwarry is a circular arena which is possibly prehistoric in origin and subsequently converted, but it is more probably of a late medieval date, constructed for the enactment of religious mystery plays such as the Cornish Cycle known as the "Ordinalia". The earliest description and plan of the Plen-an-Gwarry is that produced by William Borlase in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century when the site was 'restored', though it is felt that this work removed considerable original detail. Following its 'restoration' the Plen continued to function as a communal open space, as well as an area for the disposal of ash and cinders from nearby houses, along with some domestic rubbish. The Plen-an-Gwarry was again 'restored' in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the stone rubble revetting around the exterior probably being added during this period, when the Plen-an-Gwarry was used for stone drilling competitions by local miners.

To this day the Plen continues to be used to stage plays and community events. It is historically important to Cornwall and its culture and to St Just in particular, as a unique open space for the local community, and a significant tourist attraction.

### 2. Reasons for the Work

The work undertaken in 2011 was required because the granite stone facing the exterior of the Plen-an-Gwarry bank was bulging badly and in one place had collapsed; immediate repairs were needed for public safety reasons. The wall collapse had occurred in an area which abuts an adjoining property, the collapsed material having fallen into its grounds. This collapse occurred after significant rainfall, and as a result the wall had become unstable and posed a significant safety risk.

The revetting stone work was found to be backed with a variety of fills, some of them unsuitable for long-term stability. Over time, water run-off has eroded these fills and destabilised the revetting, leading to the recent collapse in one area and significant voiding and bulging elsewhere around the circuit of the Plen.

Following consultation with English Heritage, the Town Council agreed to make an application for Scheduled Monument Consent to carry out the required repair works. This application was submitted on 11 April 2011 and the Town Council received notification from English Heritage on 16 May 2011 that the Secretary of State was agreeable for the works to proceed, subject to conditions. Scheduled Monument Consent was granted under Section 2 of the 1979 Act and a copy of the approval notice is attached as Appendix (1) of this report.

Whilst awaiting formal consent to the works, the Town Council sought quotations from three local individuals who undertake hedging and stonework and at its meeting on 13 June 2011, delegated authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with Town Mayor to award the contract (*Minute no.TC.34/11 refers*).

The contract was awarded to:

Steve Carroll  
Hedging and Stonework  
7 Cresswell Terrace  
St Just  
Penzance  
TR19 7QF

In view of the urgency to undertake the repairs to the collapsed area and the pending Lafrowda Day celebrations in the Plen-an-Gwarry on 16 July 2011, agreement was sought from the Assistant Inspector of Monuments (English Heritage) for the four week notice period for the commencement of works to be waived. This was approved and the repair works commenced on Monday 27 June 2011.

### 3. Description of Works Undertaken

A copy of the specification for the works produced by Cornwall Council is attached at Appendix (2) to this report.

Work supervision was carried out by Adam Sharpe, Senior Archaeologist, Historic Environment Projects, Cornwall Council, who, once work commenced, attended the site on a regular basis throughout the contract period to check progress, quality and standard of the repairs. The Town Clerk also regularly attended the site throughout the contract period, whilst Town Councillors also inspected the work as it progressed. Photographic recording of the work was carried out by the Town Council and Adam Sharpe prior to the commencement of the works, and during and following completion. A site visit was also made by Nick Russell, Inspector of Monuments and Ann Preston-Jones, Field Monument Warden, English Heritage on 5 August 2011, which was also attended by Adam Sharpe, Cornwall Council and Elaine Baker, Town Clerk.

The works were carried out in two stages. The first stage was to undertake the essential repairs to the collapse into the yard of the Red Star takeaway on the western side of the monument; this was followed by a rebuilding of the bulged area in Butchers' Lane to the south of the Plen-an-Gwarry, as described in the specification.

4. Description of any Significant Finds

No significant finds were made during the works, with exception of a few small pieces of 19<sup>th</sup> Century pottery and a donkey's shoe. These artefacts have been deposited with the Plen Project, St Just.

5. Possible Further Works

At the site meeting on 5 August it was agreed that further works were required to the stone revetting as significant evidence for further bulging was noted in a number of areas. It was agreed that Adam Sharpe would photographically record the exterior of the Plen and mark up those areas requiring works, these to be, wherever possible, prioritised.

Possible funding from English Heritage was discussed in view of the need to carry out these repairs in the short term. Further information is awaited from English Heritage on the issue of possible funding. The Town Clerk confirmed that the Town Council would be discussing the development of a maintenance schedule and allocation of funds as part of its budget process.

6. Scheduled Ancient Monument Consent

A copy of the scheduled ancient monument consent is attached at Appendix (1) to this report.

7. Photographic Evidence

The photographic evidence for the work is attached at Appendix (3) to this report.

*Report produced by Elaine Baker, Town Clerk, ST Just-in-Penwith Town Council  
26<sup>th</sup> August 2011*

*Copy of the document to be retained by the Town Council.*

*Copies to the sent to:*

*Nick Russell, Inspector of Monuments, English Heritage  
National Monuments Record, Swindon  
Historic Environment Service, Cornwall Council*