

# FROM YOUR OWN CORRESPONDENTS

## Updates from Cornwall Archaeological Society's Area Representatives

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Issue 46

## THIS MONTH'S FEATURES

- LUMPS AND BUMPS ON THE COASTAL PATH
- (CHEESE) PRESS CONFERENCE
- CORNISH BRIDGE-STONES

## LUMPS AND BUMPS ON THE COASTAL PATH

*Adrian Rodda has been exploring the coastal path north of Camborne, near Crane Castle:*

The National Trust has laid a path for wheelchairs and cyclists along a section of the North Cliffs coast path near Camborne. It begins at Bassett Cove car park (SW637 441) and stretches westwards about a mile towards another car park. Reskajeage Downs was scattered with Bronze Age Barrows, but these were ploughed down in the effort to increase food production in WW2. However, the land on the cliff edge has not been thoroughly cultivated and about 200 metres west of Bassett Cove are the remains of a cliff castle or promontory fort known as Crane Castle

([https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results\\_Single.aspx?uid=MCO6539&resourceID=1020](https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=MCO6539&resourceID=1020)). Its interior has eroded into the sea. The banks are eroding at both terminals. There is an enclosure with an outer ditch up to the rampart which was reckoned to be later, possibly even a 19<sup>th</sup> century pasture for Squire Bassett's race horses.



*Picture courtesy of Cornwall Council Historic Environment Record.*

Crane Island, offshore and out of the picture above gives an idea of how large the site probably was, extending much further out to sea. The site was partially excavated in June 2012. Nothing was found to help date the outer enclosure. A trench was driven through the ditches and banks and the outer ditch proved to be 1.5m below the present ground level. The inner one was a spectacular 5.8m below the present top of the rampart. Both ditches had been cut into the bedrock. A possible posthole cut into the seaward side of the ditch suggests that a fence may have been erected, either to add to the height of the bank or to retain the rock thrown up while it was being dug. Quartz and other stones found in the ditch suggest that the landward side of the higher rampart may have been faced with white stone to make it more impressive. The steepness of the two ramparts created a deep killing zone for any attackers who had stormed the first rampart.

A word of caution – if you climb the seaward rampart be careful as there is nothing on the other side. It drops precipitously into the sea. We can't afford to lose any Area Reps or CAS members to curiosity.



*The trench across both ditches. The one in the foreground, landward side, was dug 1.5m into the bedrock. Photo Adrian Rodda.*



*Jo Sturgess of CAU drawing the section of the deeper inner ditch. You can see how much bedrock had been removed to achieve this depth, 5.8m below the present ground level. Photo Adrian Rodda.*



The site is scheduled and had to be returned to its natural state. In May 2020 the inner ditch is nicely overgrown.



*Some footfall erosion roughly follows the line of the trench from 2012.*

Intriguingly the only find was a rim from a finely made Roman period bottle, identified by James Gossip, the director, as Oxford Colour-Coat. This may have come from Magor Roman Villa, Illogan, which is not too far away. Closer still, within easy walking distance is the round in Tehidy Woods (SW639 436). But that is another story.

*Text and photos, except HER air photo, Adrian Rodda.*

## **(CHEESE) PRESS CONFERENCE**

*Richard Heard has sent in a report about cheese-press stones, which he has known people to confuse with crosses. Fellow Area Rep and Cornish cross expert Andrew Langdon has also encountered this confusion, as his comments show. The observations of these highly experienced Area Reps will make a useful guide for anyone wishing to correctly identify such intriguing stones.*

*This is Richard's report:*

Two photographs are attached. The first is found set in the passage floor of the west entrance to the Bush Inn, Crosstown, Morwenstow. The circle is about 12 inches diameter and the drain groove is toward the bottom of the photo and facing east. The stone is local fine-grained grey sandstone and worn by foot traffic.



Cheese-press stone at The Bush Inn, Morwenstow

**Photo:** Richard Heard



The second is in my possession, collected from Morwenstow parish decades back. The circle is 14" diameter. And the drain channel is to the top of the photo. Again the stone is local fine-grained grey sandstone (alas it has green algae on the surface) the whole thing is approx. 3 inches thick; max. depth of groove 4 m/m. My scale is 20 cms. I have chosen to mix metric and imperial deliberately.



Photo: Richard Heard

The two blocks are both bases for a cheese press. The cheese may merely have been placed upon the slab and weighted, possibly also confined within a wooden or tin ring. They bare witness to a former localised dairy industry.

I know of one other at Rosedown Farm, Hartland, Devon. Again set in the floor of a farm building, with a clearly defined drainage channel; and if I remember correctly made from granite and of similar dimensions to the above. Both the Bush Inn and Hartland items have been claimed by their recent owners to be 'cross heads', but the drain channels give the game away! It is even possible the slabs are in their working position to be cool, and to enjoy a cool draught of air though the whey would be difficult to collect and be useful.

Text and photographs: R.M.Heard, Kilkhampton.

*Andrew Langdon (Federation of Old Cornwall Societies and CAS Area Representative) is the foremost expert on Cornish crosses. Like Richard, he has encountered the confusion between cheese-press stones and cross-heads:*

I have photographed the stone in the floor of the passageway at the Bush Inn and I had first considered it as a broken grave slab (cross-slab) from the church, see attached a photograph of a grave slab in Wendron church. Crosses and the bases of cheese presses have often been confused, even my namesake Arthur G Langdon in *Old Cornish Crosses* recorded two cheese presses, which he later realised were not crosses. In fairness, he never saw the backs of the stones as they were built into walls. One, on page 244, was at Pendarves, Camborne - found in the kitchen garden - and another, on page 249, at Trevenning, Michaelstow.



Wendron grave-slab

Photo: Ann Preston-Jones

Several cheese presses have been set up on granite shafts to create 'mock' crosses, two were formerly at Tregaddick in Blisland and another turned up at a property in Millpool, Cardinham. The Tregaddick examples were sold as stone crosses and one now stands



outside the members' pavilion on the Royal Cornwall Showground (see attached). All the cheese presses I have recorded have been carved from granite, so I am very grateful to Richard for showing me that some are carved from local stone.



Mock cross, Royal Cornwall Showground, Wadebridge

Photo: Andrew Langdon



Cheese-press at Sithney

Photo: Andrew Langdon



I have been asked to visit several new cross discoveries, which have all turned out to be cheese presses. A short list of some appeared in *Some Aspects of the Domestic Archaeology of Cornwall* by Rosemary Robinson and Geoffrey Gilbert in 1979.

Text: Andrew Langdon

*If Area Representatives, or anyone else, have seen cheese-press stones, we'd love to hear from you at: [arearep@cornisharchaeology.org.uk](mailto:arearep@cornisharchaeology.org.uk)*

## CORNISH BRIDGE-STONES

Rosy Hanns, who sadly died earlier this year (see Issue 38), produced a phenomenal number of monitoring reports on a vast array of features, ranging from prehistoric to the modern period. Ian Thompson of The Milestone Society (<https://www.milestonesociety.co.uk/>) has consulted her extensive notes on county bridge stones in order to produce no fewer than 49 reports for Cornwall's Historic Environment Record. Many of these stones have not been recorded officially, so these entries will be of great importance.

Before we go any further, there may be some readers who are not familiar with such stones. Here is an example at Carclew Bridge, near Perran Wharf (SW 77738 38554) in Perranarworthal parish:



County Bridge stone near Carclew Bridge      **Photo:** Rosy Hanns



The words 'COUNTY' and 'BRIDGE' are carved on two faces of the Carclew Bridge stone  
**Photo:** Rosy Hanns

So, what is the significance of such stones? Ian Thompson, in his prize-winning book, *Cornish Milestones* (Twelveheads Press, Truro, 2013 (ISBN 978 0 906294 78 9), gives a succinct explanation:

*'From the 16<sup>th</sup> century certain bridges were deemed to be of such importance that their maintenance was governed by the County Court. A bridge became a county bridge when the Justices of Quarter Sessions ordered its repair...Usually the county took responsibility for the approach roads to a County Bridge as well as the bridge itself. The limit of the county's responsibility was marked by a 'county bridge stone', usually a small round topped stone bearing a carved letter C in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A considerable number of county bridge stones survive (Thompson 2013, 9-10).'*

Ian adds that: *'Rosy surveyed a hundred bridges and found thirty seven with bridge stones. There are twenty five bridges still to be surveyed and John Hanns plans to tackle these in the New Year. I have offered to go with him and lend support where needed.'*



Stratton Town Bridge (SS 22873 06333)





Little Petherick (St Issey parish, SW 91797 72129)

Lostwithiel (SX 10501 59827) – the stone is easily overlooked.



Starabridge (Linkinhorne parish - SX 29033 73761)

Newbridge (Callington parish SX 3478 6792)



There are county bridges that do not seem to have bridge stones, or at least they have not yet been found. Once again, information can be sent to:

[arearep@cornisharchaeology.org.uk](mailto:arearep@cornisharchaeology.org.uk).

Area Representatives would love to hear from fellow CAS members, and the general public, about any feature of the historic environment in their parishes, whether a new discovery, something causing concern, or even just to answer queries. If you have any concerns, or new information, about any archaeological feature, please contact the Area Representative for the parish. If you do not know who that is, just look at the inside back cover of the latest journal, *Cornish Archaeology* 57, or send an email to [arearep@cornisharchaeology.org.uk](mailto:arearep@cornisharchaeology.org.uk) .

Roger Smith, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020





