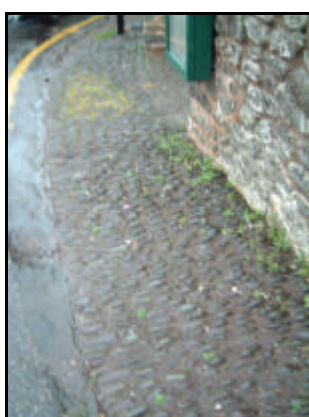




## **PORLOCK WEIR**

### **CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL**



Prepared for Exmoor National Park by John Fisher BA MA MRTPI IHBC

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Extract from Sites and Monuments Record



*The character of Porlock Weir is much influenced by its coastal location.*

## **1 TOPOGRAPHIC & HISTORIC BACKGROUND**

### **(i) Location & Essential Characteristics**

1.1 Porlock Weir is a small harbour-side settlement at the west end of Porlock Bay and faces north-east towards the Bristol Channel with extensive views towards Bossington Hill and Hurlstone Point. These lie 4 km distant to the east, with the Welsh coast between 20-30 km to the north. Steeply wooded slopes immediately above Porlock Weir, plunge some 250 metres towards the sea from the high moors beyond. They form an important backdrop, and provide shelter from the south and west.

1.2 The much larger village of Porlock is situated on the A39, less than 3 km. to the east and is linked to Porlock Weir by the B3225. This is a no-through road apart from the Worthy Toll Road, which provides an alternative route to the 1 in 4 gradient at the notorious Porlock Hill.

1.3 Part of the conservation area, and much land surrounding it, is within the Porlock Manor Estate, which for the past several centuries has been owned by the Blathwayt family. A number of the estate cottages retain picturesque examples of characteristic vernacular detail, some in the later Arts & Crafts tradition. The strong estate identity enables the maintenance of the traditional features of its buildings, which provides a timeless and homogenous character.

### **(ii) Historic Development**

1.4 The history of Porlock Weir is undoubtedly closely allied with that of Porlock village. 18<sup>th</sup> century maps refer to the harbour as Porlock Quay. Porlock dates from Saxon times when it was known as *Portloca* (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 918). In the Domesday Book it is *Portloc*, and, as the name implies was “the enclosure by the harbour.” The Manor was given by William the Conqueror to Baldwin de Brionis, and included

the Quay. In 1366 it is recorded that the new lord, Sir Nigel Loring created a park in the locality, but during the reign of Richard II, his daughter Isabel possessed the manor following division of her father's estate, and carried it by marriage into the family of Robert Harrington. Edward Rogers of Cannington is recorded as acquiring the manor from James I in 1610, from whom it was inherited by the Winter and Blathwayt families, originally from Dyrham in Gloucestershire.



*Gibraltar Cottages date from the 17th century, and display the characteristic tall lateral stacks.*

1.5 Although the precise location is not recorded, it is probable that in 1052, Harold (who was later to confront William at the Battle of Hastings), and his brother landed here from Ireland with nine ships. The landing was opposed by local inhabitants, but an armed resistance backed by men from Somerset and Devon failed to defeat it, and allegedly much booty was carried off. The Rolls of the bailiff for the Manor of Brendon dated 1427 refer to "making of the Weir of Porlock," presumably for the purpose of supplying cloth and the agricultural trade. There is an interesting record made by William Culliforde, Surveyor General of His Majesty's Customs dated 13<sup>th</sup> June 1682 which says: "I went to visit Porlock..where there is a very deep Bay and a good harbour for small vessels, to which place there are several that belong, which trade over sea... and where great quantities of Herrings are taken and cured, which begets a great concourse of people and small craft, that may be of dangerous consequence to the Customs unless well guarded."

1.6 In 1723, a comprehensive list of tolls was issued, payable to Mr William Blathwayt. This indicates that trade, mainly with Wales, included cattle, sheep and even poultry. The port was also used for the casting and recasting of the bells of Luccombe church, carried out in 1759 by William Evans of Chepstow. There was also some foreign trade, which included wine, tobacco, raisins, sugar, citrus fruit etc., and a suggestion of boat-building with charges on every boat or barque "built upon the lord's waste." The present harbour is thought to date from the early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it is believed that only one trading vessel was ever built there, in 1858.

## 2 THE CONSERVATION AREA

### (i) Background & Setting



*The present quayside is mainly 19th century, and not a weir so much as a tidal inlet which can be controlled by lock gates*

2.1 The present conservation area was designated in 1973. As well as the harbour-side settlement, it includes an extensive area of foreshore and adjoining fields to the north-west, as well as the small settlement of Worthy almost 1 km distant.

2.2 The statutory definition of a conservation area is "an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance." Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for designated conservation areas. This requirement is expanded upon in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 section 4.

2.3 An English Heritage Conservation Area Practice Note published in June 1993 also states that "Local Authorities should..define that special architectural or historic character which warrants designation by means of a published detail character analysis". Part of the purpose of such a document is to "incorporate policies in the statutory local plan...the most important (of which) will be a presumption against the loss of elements which have been identified as making a





*There are diverse architectural styles within the conservation area. None of the buildings shown are currently listed. Above left: an example of a 19th century outbuilding, largely unaltered, and currently used as a workshop. Above centre: St. Nicholas' Church is a typical example of a "tin tabernacle" which has been little altered and is still in use. There is increasing interest in the historic importance of corrugated iron buildings. Above right: An example of estate cottages of the Worthy Estate. This example is in the style of Voysey, though more likely the work of Lady Lovelace and dates from the early 20th century.*

positive contribution to that special interest which warranted designation.”

2.4 A process of change within a conservation area is inevitable. The purpose of a character statement such as this is to define as clearly as possible the historic (and by implication archaeological), architectural, and natural components of the conservation area that are considered especially important and contribute most to its character. It is also intended to advise on the scope for repair or restoration where needed and to encourage improvement or removal of unsightly features. There is an emphasis upon the use of local traditional materials and methods of construction which seeks to challenge an increasing trend towards the use of standardised artificial substitutes.

2.5 To summarise, the principal aims of this document are intended to define:

- what influences have given Porlock Weir its special character
- what chiefly reflects this character and is most worth conserving
- what has suffered damage or loss and may need reinstating
- what should be considered in guiding future changes
- what visual features particularly need safeguarding
- what existing or potential resources may be available to maintain character and assist in enhancement.

Such a document is to “incorporate policies in the statutory local plan...the most important (of which) will be a presumption against the loss of elements which have been identified as making a positive contribution to that special interest which warranted designation.”

### **3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

3.1 Planning Policy Guidance Notes 15 and 16 have advised that archaeology has become a “material consideration” in the planning process. Planning authorities must now consider the balance

between the need for development and the effects it has on the historic environment.

3.2 The Sites and Monuments Record shows some eleven sites within the conservation area. These comprise the Worthy Manor House, first mentioned in 1292, the remains of an abortive iron-ore railway from Simonsbath begun in 1860, the dock at Porlock Weir formed c.1855, the remains of several limekilns and World War II pillboxes, and the site of a former brick and tile works referred to as disused on the 1889 Ordnance Survey Map.

3.3 Of particular interest is the site of a former chapel at Chapel Knap. This was probably a Chapel of Ease, similar to those at Lynch and Tivington, and appears to have been demolished in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although portions are said to remain incorporated in the house that now occupies the site. It was probably dedicated to St. Olave, and is that mentioned in the rent roll of Cecily Bonville, Marchioness of Dorset, prepared c. 1525 where an item refers to the “wardens of St. Olave for the Chapel.” The current Chapel of Ease is a good example of a “tin tabernacle” probably dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and little altered (section 7.6).

## 4 BUILT ENVIRONMENT

### (i) Architectural Character

4.1 The pattern of land ownership in the locality, to some extent can be traced back to pre Conquest origins. The Worthy estate, which covers much of the conservation area has had an unbroken succession of estate landlords that dates from Saxon times. This has enabled a conservative approach to land management to be maintained, and as is not uncommon with such large landowners, there has been association with some of the foremost architects, in this case with C.F.A. Voysey, albeit late in his career. Several cottages or cottage groups display characteristic local vernacular features, with one of the most typical features being the tall front or rear lateral stacks. Such features normally date from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century when in most cases the building, if not new, would have had ceilings and fireplaces added to replace the hall, open to the roof with a central hearth. Where later architects have been employed, in this case Voysey, who was renowned for re-working the vernacular style with some of his own trade-mark features, an element of the picturesque has been added. This Arts & Crafts movement resembled the early 19<sup>th</sup> century “cottage ornee” style that preceded it, and flourished in the late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century, again with inventive ornament that mainly used locally sourced materials of stone, wood or metal.

4.2 No individual feature is especially lavish in style or detail, and the overall scale and pattern of



*Left: Window detail at the Anchor Hotel showing late 19th century sash windows with narrow glazing bars. Centre: an example of a house dating from around the 1920s with original small-paned casement windows and clay double-Roman tiles. Although lacking ornament, there are continuing elements of Arts & Crafts design. Right: A timber mullioned frame with metal casement windows, probably dating from the late 17th-18th century.*

building materials is generally harmonious, although the contrast in scale between some of the earlier vernacular buildings and those added in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is very stark.

(ii) Character Areas

4.3 The conservation area can be divided into three separate sub-areas, which have a distinct Character. Porlock Weir itself [1], contains the majority of settlement within the conservation area. The other two consist of [2] the small hamlet of Worthy with a typical group of estate buildings, and [3], the regular pattern of open fields and the curving foreshore that lie between.

Use of Materials - (i) BUILDINGS

4.4 The Exmoor Design Guide refers to the way in which “everything was done in the simplest way using in the main local materials to achieve a pleasing and practical result.” “Externally the walls were sometimes lime-washed, white or cream, either directly onto the stone or over a coating of lime/sand render. Roofs, gabled not hipped, were usually covered with stone tiles.. Thatch was also commonly used; the vernacular material is combed wheat reed with a simple butt up (not decorated) ridge.”

4.5 The main stone type originally obtained from local quarries, all now closed, is the hard dark red-purple or grey-green Devonian sandstone. This is difficult to work, so is normally encountered as roughly coursed rubble, and in buildings from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century usually has red brick dressings. There is a former quarry in Worthy Woods above Chapel Knap.

4.6 The equally important material, certainly in terms of visual impact, is rendering. This is a mixture of lime-mortar and lime-wash slobbered over the stone or cob. The lime-wash traditionally combines with a black tar-banded plinth. Thatch is the traditional roofing material but coarse stone slate was produced in the locality, for example at Treborough in the Brendon Hills. Most that survives is the much thinner gauge slate, either from Cornwall or South Wales, the former predominating and distinguished by its more opalescent and sometimes greenish appearance. From the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, much thatch was replaced by various forms of pantile or double Roman clay tiles, mainly manufactured in the Bridgwater area. The larger late 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings, some probably purpose-built as hotels or boarding houses, have plain clay tiles.

4.7 The traditional long-straw wheat-reed has for some years been virtually unobtainable, with most thatchers preferring to use more durable water-reed, much of which is now imported from Eastern Europe. There is current research at regional and national level, to try and re-establish the wheat-reed tradition and produce a straw that matches water-reed in durability. In recent years The National Trust has been carrying out trials on the nearby Holnicote estate, and now produces enough straw from this source to carry out patching and re-thatching on its own cottages. English Heritage is in the process of encouraging similar initiatives in order to make supplies of good quality wheat-reed more readily available.

4.8 The earliest historic windows in the conservation area are mainly a mixture of timber and metal casement, some with mullioned frames. The several instances of much larger sash windows are confined to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings with views out to sea. Some cottage windows are of forged iron, and are round-headed as at the old lime-kiln site and on a much smaller scale at the Ashley Combe toll house. These also date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

4.9 Most surviving doors of traditional design provide relatively low headroom and are constructed in a plank and ledged form, some with fixed lights. A few of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings have examples of what may be termed rustic Arts & Crafts detail, using ornate fixings and ornamented boarding with ribs or studs. There is some excellent work of this genre by Voysey and Lady Lovelace. Few openings earlier than the 18<sup>th</sup> century survive. Where they do, for example at Beach Cottage and Worthy Manor (see section 7.1-7.2 ) they typically have massive pointed arch oak frames, and are jointed with pegs and often chamfered with stops.





A series of photographs that emphasise the coastal setting and sense of remoteness of Porlock Weir. Top left and right views of the tidal inlet showing the backdrop of Worthy Woods and with the beach to the left. Right: to the east, the beach appears to be extending and is gradually being colonised by vegetation. In such low-lying settings, buildings become important skyline features. Lower left: the entry to the conservation area from the east is along a hedged and banked road, providing glimpses of the sea. Lower centre and right: as in the views above, boats as much as buildings add to the visual character. Bottom left and right: coastal locations often provide a setting for historic defensive features; in this case former World War II “pill box” fortifications. In the example on the right, sea erosion of the foundations has led to acute subsidence.





There are some locations where ground surfaces and steps are constructed using natural materials, or where original paving blocks survive. The example shown on the right probably dates from the late 19th century.

#### Use of Materials - (ii) BOUNDARY FEATURES

4.10 There are substantial stretches of boundary or retaining walls built of local sandstone rubble, usually roughly coursed. In some instances beach boulders have been used and no mortar is added. Some free-standing walls are in a dilapidated condition, whereas others have been or are being painstakingly rebuilt, as shown in the examples illustrated (see p.16). Sometimes, especially as a support to earth banks the locally distinctive dry-stone pattern known as “dyking” is evident. This method places the bedding plane of the stone in a vertical or slanted “herring-bone” pattern and adds a pleasing contrast. When a retaining feature to hedgerow banks, it can become prone to deterioration as a result of root spread when not regularly maintained. These local types of walling make a valuable contribution to the character of the conservation area, as well as providing a strong sense of enclosure or privacy in several cases.

#### Use of Materials - (iii) GROUND SURFACES

4.11 A number of locations in Porlock Weir have stone paved or cobbled surfaces as part of the street scene. The most prominent are around the quayside and as forecourt features to several outbuildings and workshops. The elevated cottage row beyond St. Nicholas’ Church has access by steps of squared stone blocks. There are also several examples of patterned “stable-block” paving, some probably dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **5 BUILDING FORM & ORNAMENT**

5.1 Much detailed ornament has already been referred to in sections 4.1 and 4.4 -4.9. Much of the character of Porlock Weir derives from the informally arranged building groups facing the harbour and out to sea from several different levels. Pevsner notes : “They make pretty pictures indeed, without any of the close completeness of Clovelly or Mevagissey” Pevsner also describes in some detail the work of “*Charles F. Annesley Voysey*, one of the best domestic architects of England about 1900” whose client Lord Lovelace employed him periodically to the end of his working life in 1936. This involved extensive alterations to Worthy Manor and estate cottages at Anstey Combe. Pevsner also notes that “*Lady Lovelace* herself was quite capable of designs in Voysey’s spirit and style,” though the exact extent of her work, other than at nearby Culbone, is not specified.



5.2 Although Porlock Weir absorbed some additional development, mainly in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it tended to maintain the Arts & Crafts tradition and is not unduly obtrusive. The setting against a steep wooded backdrop is a strong identifying feature.

## 6 CONDITION OF BUILDINGS

6.1 The large majority of historic buildings, both listed and unlisted, are well maintained, and in good structural condition. There is a large proportion of timber or metal windows, mainly casements, though the later 19<sup>th</sup> century three-storey development has mainly sash windows, and some panelled doors, whereas doors in earlier properties are mainly ledged and braced. These can be difficult to date, but some early frames survive in their original form, and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century work by Voysey and others tends to imitate the early examples. Where replacements have been made, some closely match the original; but it is noted there is a slight tendency to use pVCU replacements. These often fail to reflect the traditional patterns, and the frames are frequently inadequately recessed within the architrave.

## 7 HISTORIC BUILDINGS

### (i) Listed Buildings

7.1 Within the conservation there are five listings, covering a total of some nine properties. All are categorised as grade II. In Porlock Weir itself, **nos. 1-5 Gibraltar Cottages** are a mainly 17<sup>th</sup> century

thatched group that seem almost to spill on to the beach, and have three large rear external stacks rising from the eaves. They are mainly stone rubble and cob, roughcast to the front, but exposed stone to the rear. The listing details describe them as “a modest row, maintaining considerable early fabric and dominant forms, especially at the back, in an important townscape location. There are some 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century mullioned windows. Almost opposite, **Beach Cottage** is also of 17<sup>th</sup> century origin, though it is thought the walls were raised and the roof reconstructed a century later. The thatched roof is half-hipped and hipped at either



Some examples of listed buildings within the conservation area; *Top right: Toll cottage, Worthy Estate, one of several buildings dating from the early 20th century designed or influenced by Voysey. Above left: Beach Cottage; a good example of a 17th century three-cell cottage in the local vernacular style. Above centre: The door and jointed door-frame at Beach Cottage are probably original. Above right: a glimpse of Voysey's work at the outbuildings of Worthy Manor showing a massive stack with triple smoke vents exemplifying his style.*

end with a large shouldered front lateral stack adjoining the entrance. The typical plan is three-cell with cross-passage and a rear outshut. The four-light ovolo-moulded mullioned window and heavy four-centred arch head and chamfered door-frame are almost certainly original.

7.2 The other local concentration of listed buildings at Worthy is dominated by **Worthy Manor** built of stone rubble, part rough-cast under slate roofs, with four stone stacks. The original building is 16<sup>th</sup> century or earlier and the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century alterations are probably by C F A Voysey. The cambered-head porch entrance, added catslide roof and casement windows are all of this period. Of the original features, there are reputed to be plank and muntin screens, chamfered beams ornamented with stops, pointed arch timber door frames, and an exposed collar-beam roof. Some 20 metres south-east of the Manor is a range of outbuildings, including a **barn, former stables with loft above and coach house**. The barn was probably originally 17<sup>th</sup> century, with early 20<sup>th</sup> century extensions by C F A Voysey. As Pevsner states they “must have been altered by him, as his characteristic chimney stacks and metalwork details prove, especially in the stables and coach-house.” The walls are part exposed stone rubble and part roughcast render; roofs are steeply pitched and combine thatch and local slate. The slate section has bell-cast eaves and hipped dormers and there is large roughcast stack at the higher south-west end. There are plank doors, some double or stable type, and two-light casement windows, with leaded panes.

## (2) Other Key Buildings

7.3 The majority of other buildings within the conservation area fall within this category. Among the most prominent, though with little regard for the local vernacular, are the late 19<sup>th</sup> century groups on the approach to the harbour. “**Andrews on the Weir**” is two storey with attic rooms and is rendered, including the stacks, and with plain tile roof, of complex construction that includes plain gable, canted hip and half-hipped profiles. There are square and canted bays, with a majority containing sash windows. The **Anchor Hotel** is also rendered, and part plain-tiled but more interesting in that it appears to have had two three-storey wings added to an earlier two-storey building. There is a mix of sash and casement windows some canted and recessed, others oriels. At the centre is a wide 10 over 10 pane sash window, probably of early 19<sup>th</sup> century origin. Again the scale of the later additions is disproportionate, especially in relation to the adjoining **Old Ship Inn**. This comprises two buildings; the front one is probably 17<sup>th</sup> century with a long low frontage, and large shouldered front projecting stack. It is whitewashed over stone with half-hipped thatched roof, and large shouldered front lateral stack with square-section shaft. To the rear and left, and of similar scale, but with less prominent stack is the second building, probably of 18<sup>th</sup> century date. This is roughcast with double-Roman tiled roof. Both have timber casement windows with rectangular-leaded panes. Immediately adjoining the latter is a group of mainly single-storey outbuildings, grouped around a forecourt with remnants of a former cobbled surface. Built of stone with brick dressings, some chamfered, and double-Roman tiled roofs, they are currently disused and showing signs of dilapidation. To the front left of this group is a **K6 type telephone box** of the familiar red type designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1935.



Some buildings, although not listed are prominent within the conservation area. *Above left:* A cottage row adjoining the harbour, and probably of 17<sup>th</sup> century origin is visible from many vantage points. *Above right:* A late 19<sup>th</sup> century building facing the harbour was probably built to accommodate holiday visitors. It retains most original frontage detail.





Further examples of unlisted but historic buildings that make a valuable contribution to the character of the conservation area. *Above left:* late 19th century former stables/workshops adjoining the Ship Hotel. *Above centre:* buildings facing the coast in the latter half of the 19th century were built on a much grander scale than the vernacular buildings that preceded them. This sometimes leads to dramatic contrasts between them as here with the 17th century Ship Hotel on the left and late 19th century Anchor Hotel to the right. *Above right:* part of an attractive row of six cottages. The front lateral stacks suggest late 17th – early 18th date with later frontage alterations.

7.4 Almost opposite Gibraltar Cottages (7.2), is a low cottage row, probably of 18th century origin with later modifications, rendered and a mix of thatch with tall brick stack, slate and decorative plain tile roofs. The second edition Ordnance Survey Map indicates a former Reading Room at this site. Further to the east, and set well back from the road is a mirrored cottage pair with front-facing gables at each end. They probably date from c.1900 and are of an estate cottage style, typical of the period, built of stone rubble with brick dressings and segmental arch openings, under a double-Roman tiled roof.



7.5 Part of the quayside group is a three-storey row of stone rubble with slate roofs, half-hipped at one end with four hipped dormers. Most windows



*Above right:* former lime kilns, probably dating from the late 19th century with later house (early 20th century) built over. *Below left:* The Ship Inn includes two houses built in local vernacular style; that in the foreground predating that to the rear, to which 19th century stables (on the left) were added. *Below right:* This three-storey group, by the quayside appear on the 1840 Tithe Map, and are likely to date from the early 19th century. It is probable that the ground floor has always been reserved for commercial use with living accommodation above.



are casements with narrow glazing bars. Although architecturally undistinguished, they are an important visual stop. Alongside, and to the rear is an extensive range of single-storey workshops mainly dating from the late 19th century, and probably built to service harbourside activities. The stone frontages with brick dressings under triple-ridge tiled roofs are little altered, and have been usefully adapted to their current use as craft workshops. Some retain stable-block paved floors or forecourts in variable condition. Some distance beyond fronting the shoreline are two former segmental arched lime kilns, incorporated into a later house. A three-storey gabled wing has round-headed metal-frame windows.

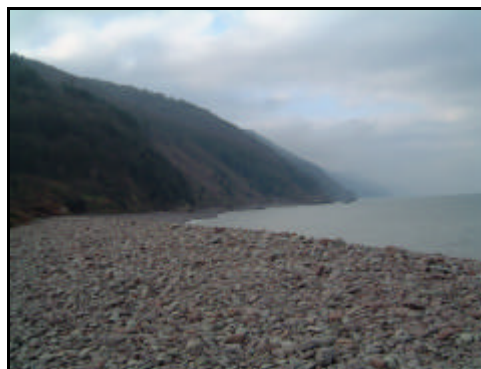
7.6 Ascending the hill alongside the Ship Inn, to where the lanes converge, on the right is a row of cottages thatched at each end. They are stone-built, some whitewashed or rendered and picturesquely set above the carriageway and approached by steps. The series of front lateral stacks suggest a date, possibly as early as the late 17th century. Most retain timber casement windows and plank doors. Beyond this group, and also in a raised position approached by slate-surfaced steps is **St. Nicholas's Church**, a typical "tin tabernacle" of c. 1880. There is increasing interest in buildings of this type, as evidenced by a dedicated website ([www.tintabernacles.com](http://www.tintabernacles.com)). This example has a small gabled porch, tiny belfry and small-scale pointed arch windows. Nearby, is the site of an earlier chapel at **Chapel Knap**, although no built evidence is thought to survive. The site is occupied by a large late 19th century house and outbuildings, mainly stone-built with brick dressings, double-Roman tiled roof and casement windows, some with narrow glazing bars. As in the style of many villas of the period, the main frontage faces away from the highway, with former service wing grouped around a courtyard with stable-block paving.

7.7 Facing back towards the harbour and adjoining the quayside is another prominent group of cottages – a local landmark – built at the edge of the shingle. They probably date from the early-mid 18th century. Built of stone rubble, now colour-washed, all would have originally been thatched, and two have tall rear stacks. Only that on the right retains its thatch; the other two having double-Roman tiled roofs, probably dating from the early 20th century. Although some original detail has been lost and some outbuildings added including corrugated iron, they provide a picturesque setting as a backdrop to the quayside and boat moorings.

7.8 Elsewhere, both within or within the vicinity of the conservation area are several individual or small groups of dwellings following a loosely Arts & Crafts tradition which persisted until the 1930s. This was probably inspired by the late work of Voysey and of Lady Lovelace for the Worthy estate. A good example is the estate cottage group at Worthy, probably by Lady Lovelace herself, dating from c.1920 built to an irregular plan of stone rubble and roughcast with Cornish slate roof, tall, slightly tapered stacks with smoke vent, in the style of Voysey, with characteristic openings of small-pane casement windows and plank doors (see illustration on page 6).

## 8 LANDSCAPE & TREES

8.1 At Porlock Weir there is an especially important link between the built and natural envi-



*There are extensive views of the natural landscape from several vantage points within the conservation area. Above left: view from tidal inlet towards beach with Hurlstone Point in the background. Above right: coastal view looking west along shore-line.*



Trees are an important element of the conservation area and its setting. *Above left:* the road to Worthy and Ashley Combe skirts the ancient woodland forms much of the southern boundary of the conservation area. *Above centre:* tree-planting at the large public car park helps to break up the large area of asphalt *Above right:* an important tree group, in this case Douglas Firs which adjoin the south-eastern boundary of the conservation area.

ronment. The main landscape elements of significance to the character of the conservation area are as follows:

- (1) the harbour-side setting and associated tidal inlet with boat berthing.
- (2) the extensive areas of beach, including much above high water mark and typified by large boulders. This is recorded as within a “County Geological Site” (CLN 11) by the Exmoor National Park Local Plan.
- (3) outstanding coastline views; to the east across Porlock Bay to Hurlstone Point; to the west the dramatic cliffs towards Foreland Point.
- (4) the backdrop of deciduous woodland on steep slopes or combes along the south-western boundary of the conservation area.
- (5) extensive stone walls, earth banks, including walled and hedgerow banks.
- (6) the inherent quality of the built environment, and the importance of buildings in their landscape setting. This includes distinctive vernacular detail, and instances of traditional methods of construction and use of materials.



Within a relatively short distance the character of the landscape can change dramatically. *Left:* the view of the open beach, east of the harbour is an almost entirely natural landscape. *Right:* a contrasting view towards the harbour where the boats and buildings form the main focus of interest.



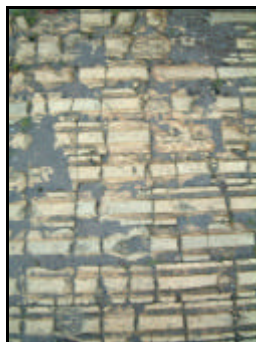
Left: a section of field wall showing the traditional method of “dyking” where the stone is laid towards a vertical plane. Right: a recently laid section of wall using beach boulders.

8.2 There are relatively few noteworthy specimen trees or tree groups. Several mature oaks (*quercus robur*), a stone pine (*pinus pinea*), Scots pine (*pinus sylvestris*), and a maidenhair (*glinko biloba*) were noted, and there is a good group of Douglas fir (*pseudotsuga menziesii*) adjoining the southern tip of the conservation area.

8.3 It is noted that the large area of woodland referred to in (4) above, is indicated in the Local Plan as “Category 3 Woodland” (CLN 3) as classified in Section 3 of the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act of 1985. They have a natural beauty “(that) is, in the opinion of the National Park Authority, particularly important to conserve.” This woodland also falls within the “County Wildlife Site” (CLN 11) category which are considered to be “of local nature conservation importance.”

## 9 DETRACTIONS & VULNERABILITY

9.1 Porlock Weir has few obvious detractions. There is little overt commercialisation or street clutter, and almost no intrusion of the skyline by overhead wires around the harbour-side. In some of the back lanes however, they are still prominent. The main public car park could possibly be made more visually contained by further hard and soft landscaping. Some areas would benefit from resurfacing, using natural materials where possible, and some relatively minor evidence of salt water erosion rectified, and improved access to the beach considered.



From left to right:: Poorly repaired surface at the Quayside. Deteriorating stable-block paving. Cobbles and edging stones in need of restoration. Evidence of severe sea erosion of metal railing.

9.2 The large majority of buildings at Porlock Weir, almost all of which make a valuable contribution to the historic built environment are unlisted, and are therefore more vulnerable to unsuitable replacement doors and windows and other less well regulated frontage alterations than their listed counterparts.

## 10 KEY LOCAL FACTORS & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

10.1 Sections 3.1 to 3.4 of the Exmoor National Park Local Plan Draft Deposit (published October 2001) contain important principles concerning the conservation of buildings and settlements. Proposals for any new development, restoration of existing buildings or features, and enhancement projects, should include consideration of these principles, which are expanded upon in the following sections.

10.2 Many 19th century and earlier buildings in the conservation area have retained most of their original features and strongly represent either the local vernacular style, or examples of the largely universal late 19<sup>th</sup> century style of tall elevations and large sash windows. Relatively few are grade II listed, but even non-listed buildings often have considerable historic and architectural quality. For example, many buildings lining the approach to the quay are bold examples of late Victorian architecture that typify many coastal locations. Their scale, although quite out of proportion to earlier buildings, has become accepted and their authenticity should be preserved. Few buildings exhibit poor care and maintenance, apart from one or two cases where they have become redundant of their original use. There is a need reintroduce traditional building skills, especially the use of lime-wash, and other craft skills in maintaining buildings, especially those of vernacular origin. (Section 4).

10.3 The following are guidelines that the Exmoor National Park Plan endorses when considering any alterations, repair or restoration to buildings within the conservation area. In the case of Porlock Weir, the care and maintenance of the historic built and natural environment is generally to a good standard, but the following guidelines need to be emphasised to ensure that these standards are maintained or strengthened.

### (i) Buildings in the Conservation Area

- **In considering proposals for any new development or redevelopment involving existing buildings or structures, it should be borne in mind that stricter safeguards against any form of demolition in conservation areas have recently been introduced. Historic signage should be maintained, as far as possible, in its original state. Any new or reinstated signs should respect the original forms including use of cast-iron lettering or traditional sign-writing**
- **Existing features of quality that typify the historic built environment should be retained. Any new development within the conservation area is likely to be extremely limited but where it does occur, it should echo the existing in terms of scale, height, proportion and use of traditional methods of construction, including openings and any boundary features.**
- **Existing stone boundary and retaining walls, and existing banks, and footpath only access should be safeguarded, where possible, especially those that identify the historic street and plot layout pattern of earlier settlement.**

### (ii) Features

- **The conservation, and where necessary, the repair of walls and/or historic railings, and timber fencing is considered important. Where appropriate consider using additional timber or ironwork that reflects the local craft traditions.**
- **Ensure the retention and enhancement of any historic street furniture, and replace unsympathetic road traffic and direction signs.**
- **Encourage retention of the character of existing entrances, including gate piers, and associated period timber or metal gates.**
- **Ensure necessary protection of all natural stone paving, cobbles, kerbs and gulleys, both as part of the**





*Above left and centre: unlisted buildings of historic character can be vulnerable to inappropriate frontage alterations, especially to doors and windows Above right: an access to the beach which would benefit from improvement in keep-*

highway and where in private ownership. Consider where such materials might be employed in any resurfacing or enhancement schemes. Materials from local sources should be used whenever possible.

- Seek to retain or reinstate all existing period windows, doors, and cast iron rainwater goods. This includes the typical 19<sup>th</sup> century decorative estate features, and any examples of an Arts and Crafts tradition, for example, decorative window glazing and forged metal window and door catches.
- It should be noted that the National Park Authority can consider introduction of an Article 4(2) Direction where boundary features, for example, stone or brick walls, and openings are under threat. This also has the potential to effect control over the potential installation of UPVC windows and doors, inappropriate roof materials, external cladding, and use of exposed block-work.

(iii) Historic Setting and Landscape

- Before any change of use or alteration takes place, ensure that consideration is given to the historic importance of any existing building, including outbuildings and non-residential uses. This also includes the previous history and present significance of any small outbuildings located beyond the main street frontages.
- Although existing trees within the conservation area appear to be healthy, older specimens would benefit from periodic health checks. Where limited further life is detected, measures may need to be taken to plant young trees of a similar or suitable alternative species. These could be gradually introduced to replace older specimens. Some fast growing garden conifers, such as Lawson’s Cypress, can strike a discordant note in a historic setting and should be avoided in an environmentally sensitive location.
- There is an important relationship between the setting of buildings in the conservation area and the associated topographic and landscape features, for example the steeply wooded slopes and combes that border much of the southern edge of the conservation area. Attention is drawn to the Local Plan Objectives for Woodland, one of which is “to gain a deeper understanding of Exmoor’s trees and woodlands through a comprehensive programme of research and survey work derived from the Exmoor Woodland Research Strategy.”



*Materials used in the past may no longer be available, but are often very durable and add much character to the conservation*

(iv) Use of Traditional Materials

- Encourage re-pointing of stonework using suitable mortar mixes, ide-



ally with a lime base. Cement rich mortars and raised or “ribbon pointing should be avoided. This is especially the case for some of the softer types of sandstone.

- Where appropriate, steps should be taken to re-discover supplies of natural materials, preferably from their historic source or equivalent, and to encourage the development of skills in their use.
- More fully research the development of the early settlement, the sources of natural materials used in building construction, and whether former sources of stone or slate might become re-established.

## 11 IMPORTANT POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

11.1 Porlock Weir, in its remote coastal location has one of the most picturesque settlements within the National Park. It also benefits from an attractive tidal inlet, which can be controlled by lock gates, and, almost uniquely, is largely enclosed by ancient woodland. There are also striking outward views across the curving shoreline of Porlock Bay towards the hills that terminate at Hurlstone Point, and the manner in which some early cottages have been built virtually out on to the beach is a distinctive feature.

11.2 In spite of relatively few buildings appearing on the statutory list, there are many other buildings of great intrinsic character, by virtue of their construction and location. There is a good case for recommending a few additions to the statutory list. A more important consideration is that of applying an Article 4(2) Direction to protect historic frontages and boundaries, especially of the more prominent unlisted buildings. As Porlock Weir appears to have a significant history, any information recording additional historic evidence of the early origins of buildings and previously unrecorded historic building features, especially of interiors, would be especially significant.

11.3 Porlock Weir experiences a considerable volume of visitors, especially during the main holiday season. This raises the potential for some enhancement, especially of ground surfaces where disrepair and badly worn or uneven surfaces are evident. It is important to maintain this aspect of character, and any potential for ground surfaces using local natural stone or paving materials to be restored or extended should be investigated. There is also some scope for improved signage, as well as greater interpretation of the origins of the settlement and what remains of the historic built environment.

*Several buildings or building groups at Porlock Weir have especially close links with the surrounding landscape.*



11.4 There is an especially close visual relationship between most buildings and the steep wooded backdrop. The beach and immediately adjoining coastline also forms a dramatic feature. Perhaps more than any other settlement within the National Park, Porlock Weir sustains an unspoiled relationship with both. It is therefore considered especially important to emphasise that these areas of associated landscape are integral to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

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# **HISTORIC MAPS**



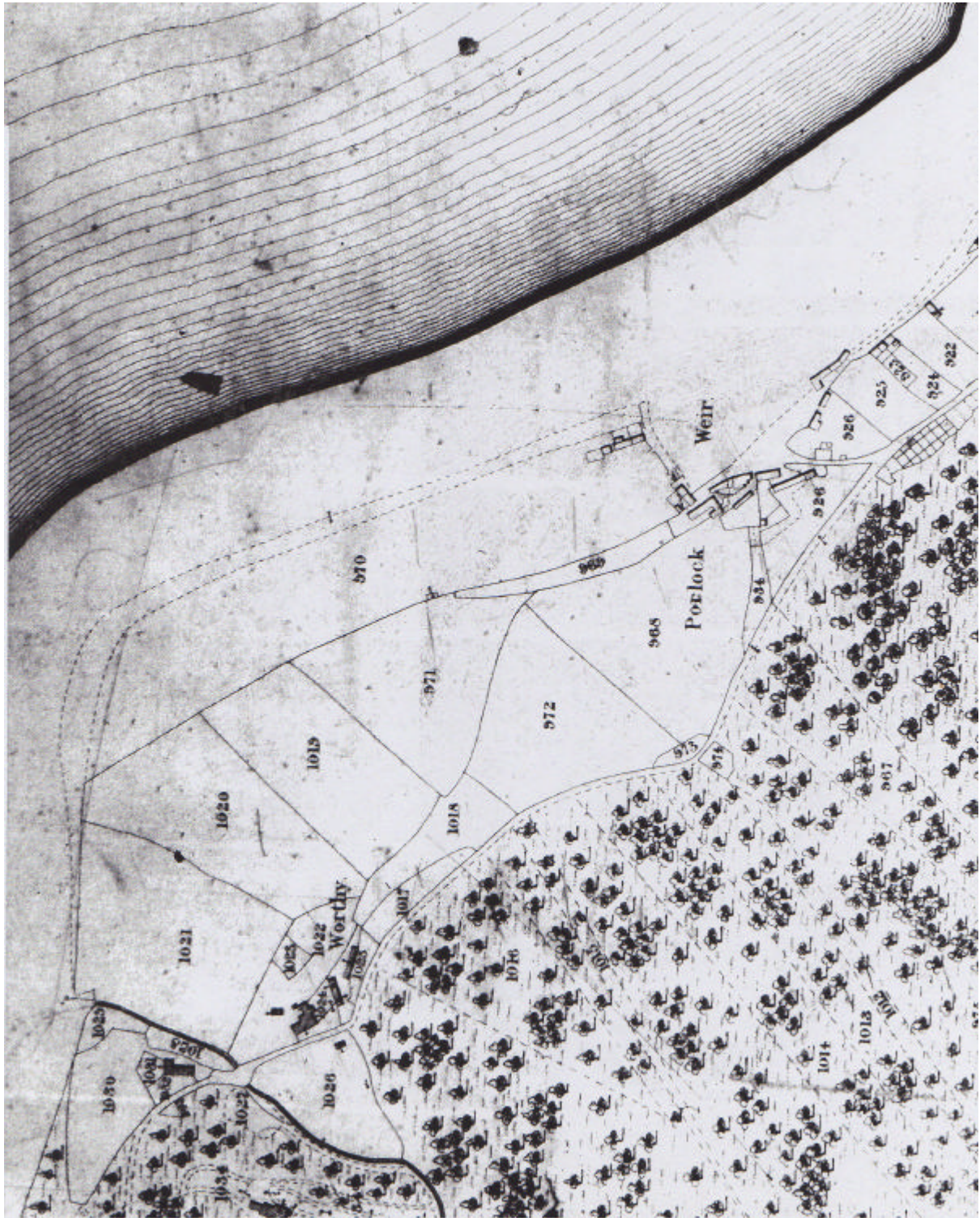
DAY & MASTERS MAP OF SOMERSET 1782 [Extract]

[Reproduced by courtesy of Somerset County Record Office]



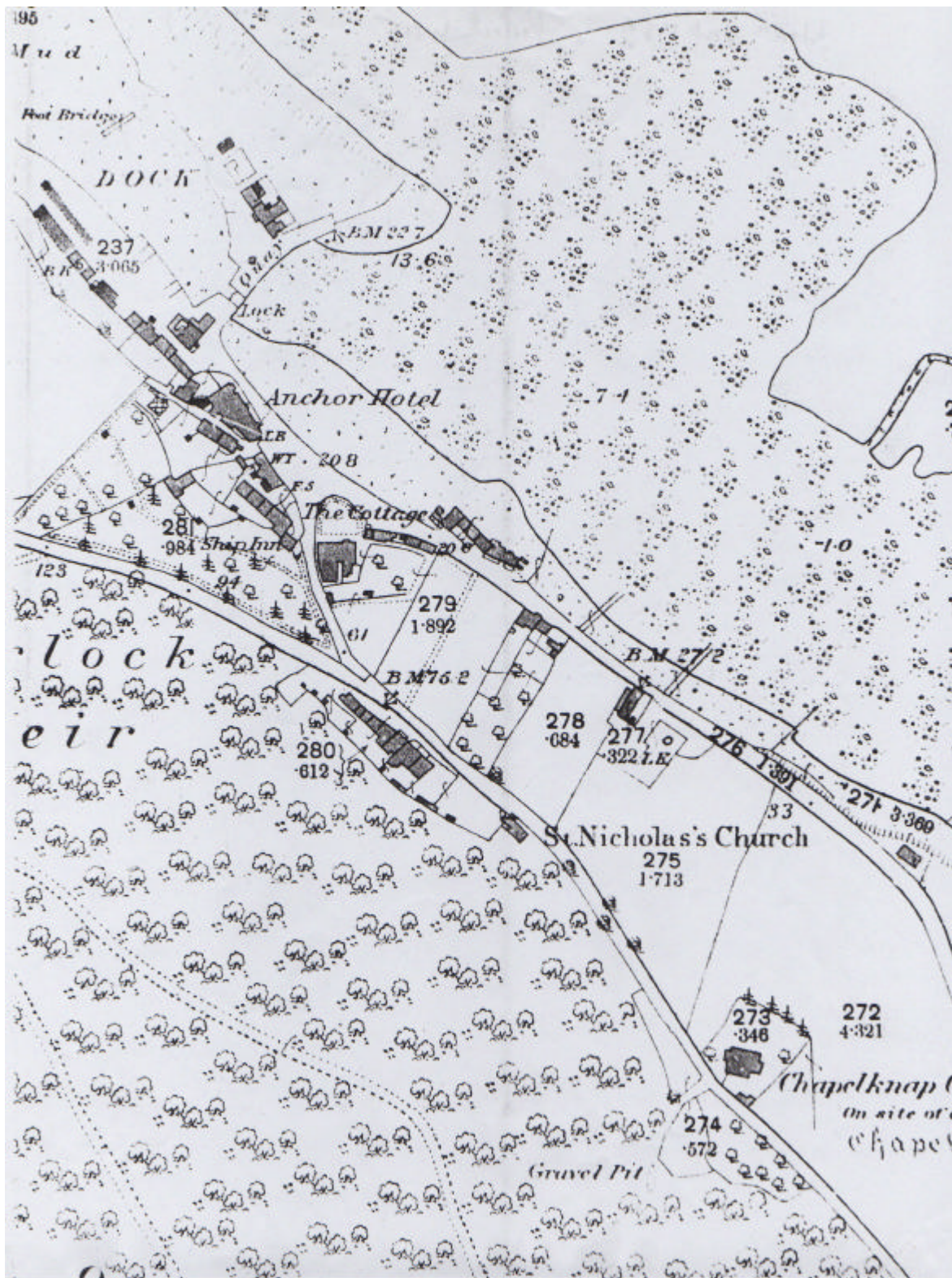


TITHE MAP c.1840



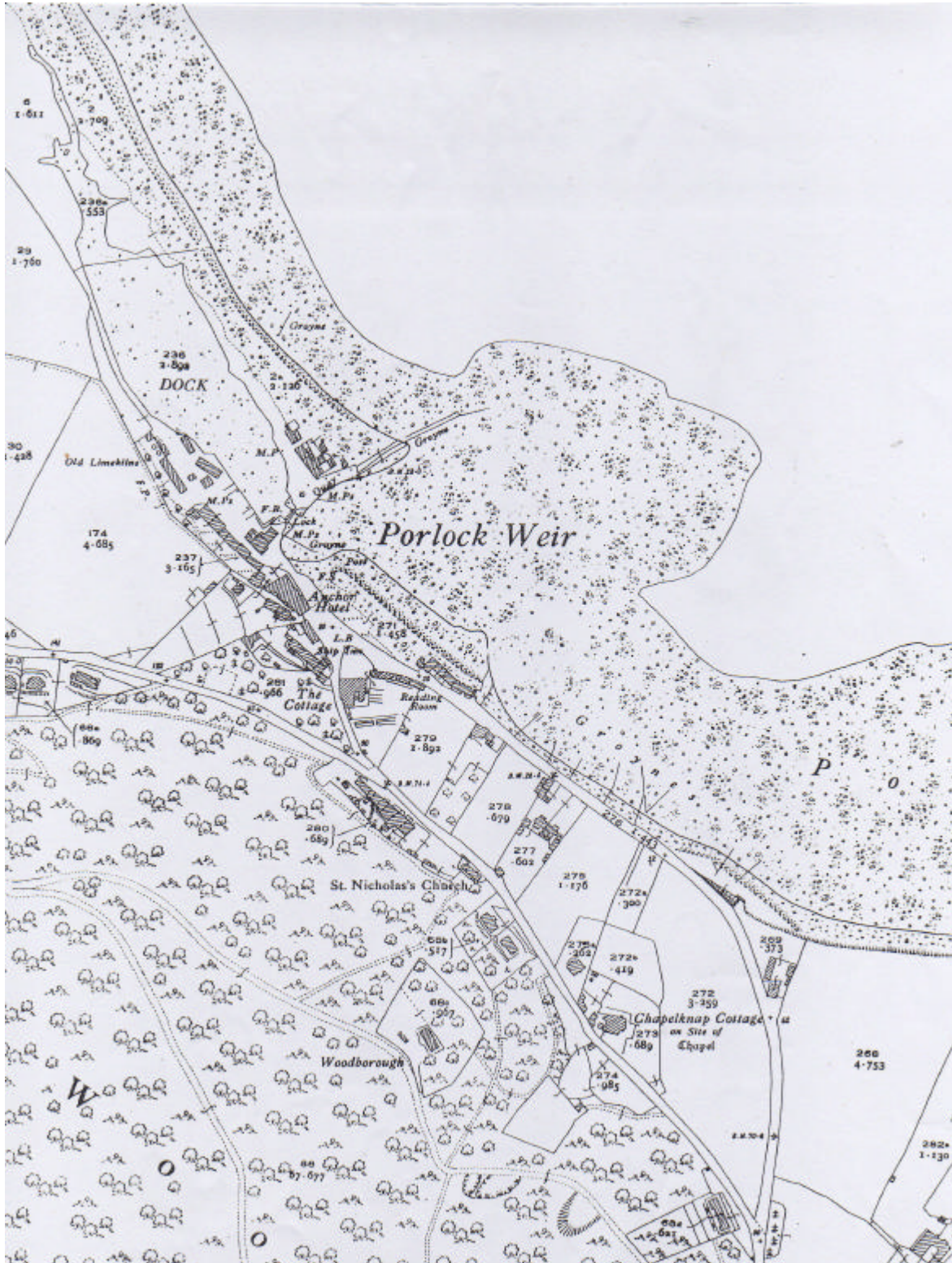


FIRST EDITION OS MAP c.1889 1:2500 SCALE  
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SECOND EDITION OS MAP c.1929 1:2500 SCALE  
[NOT TO SCALE]



# **APPRAISAL MAPS**

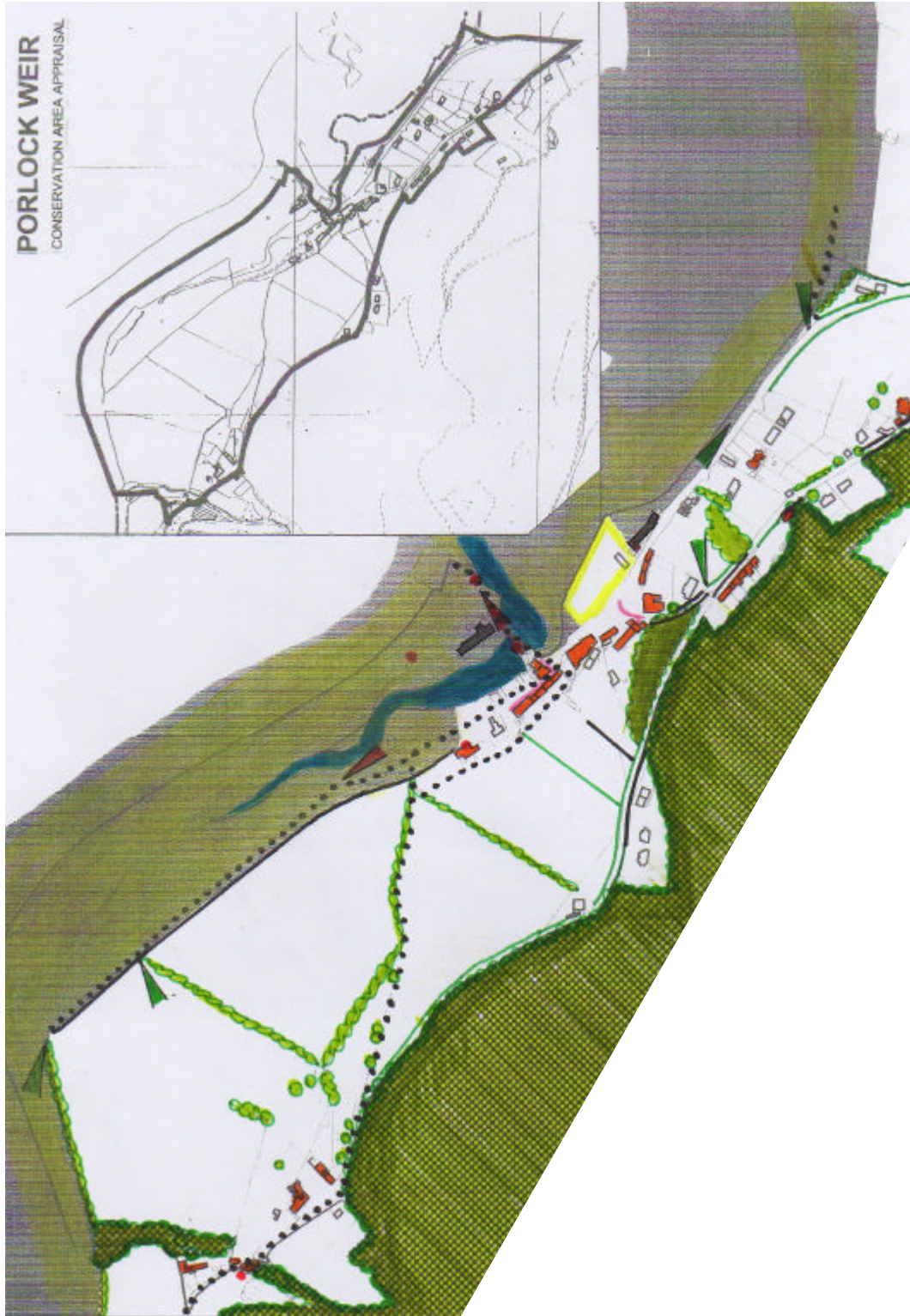


# CONSERVATION AREA & HISTORIC BUILDINGS





# SIGNIFICANT FEATURES



## AGE OF BUILDINGS

**NOTE:** The dates shown are approximate. Parts of the building may be earlier than shown. A more accurate date can often only be determined by a detailed internal inspection. Buildings shown in two colours indicate the original and one other main phase of development, although there may have been others.





## BUILDING MATERIALS – ROOFS

**NOTE:** This visual survey is for guidance purposes only, and indicates the predominant, rather than the precise roofing material in every instance. Accuracy cannot always be guaranteed in differentiating between natural slate and slate substitutes. Sites left blank either indicate that inspection was not possible, or that buildings are of too recent origin to be classified as historic.





## BUILDING MATERIALS – WALLS

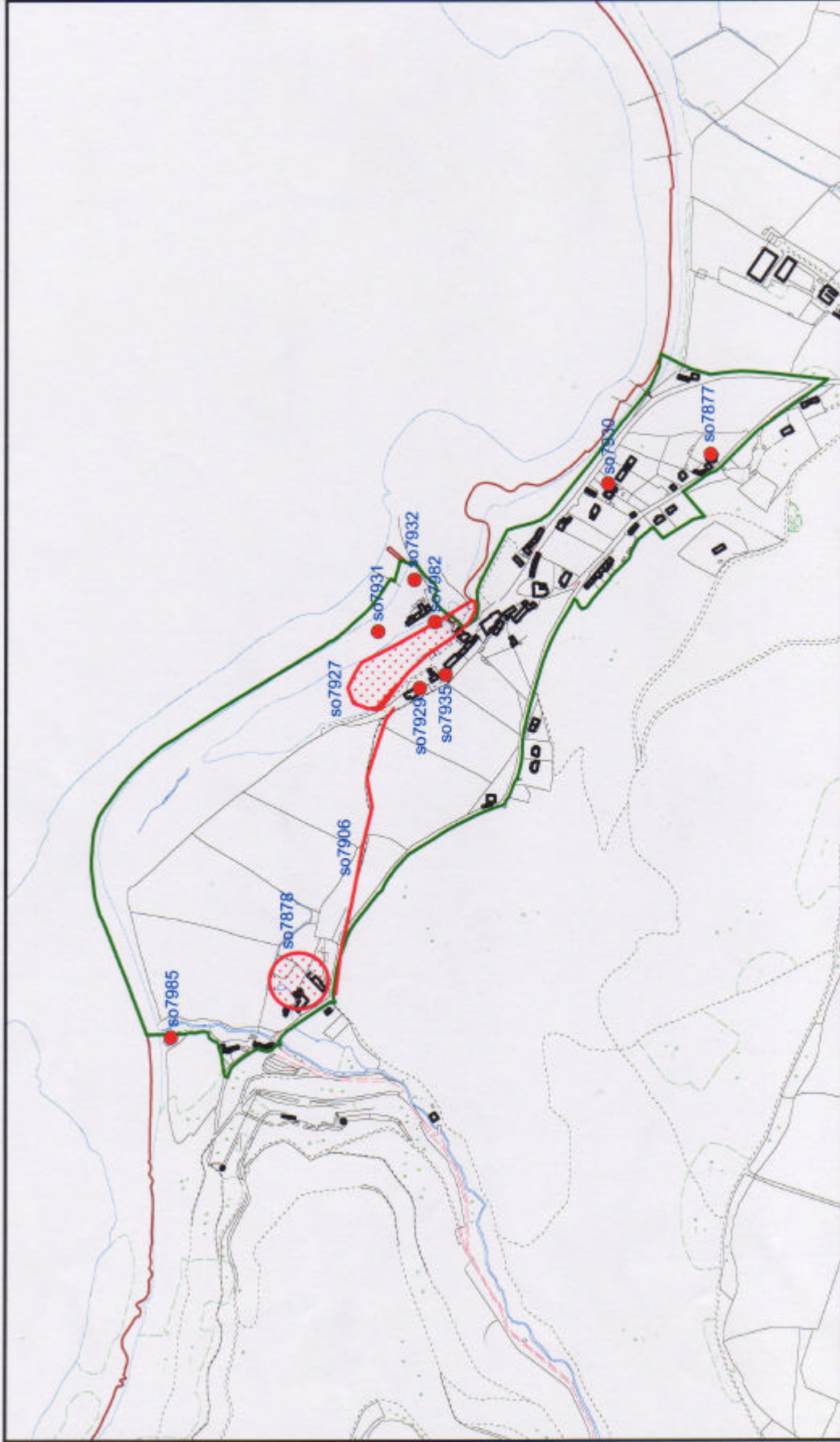
**NOTE:** This visual survey indicates the predominant rather than the precise walling material in every instance. Buildings outlined in one colour and filled in with another, denote the two main building materials (e.g. painted stone and render). Accuracy cannot always be guaranteed, since buildings may have a different frontage material to the rest of the building, which may not be visible. Sites left blank, indicate inspection was not possible, or that buildings are considered too recent to be classified as historic.





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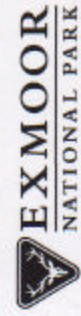
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Date: 28 April 2004

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Scale 1:7500



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