

# 'ST JOHN'S WELL, TINTEN, ST TUDY - A FORGOTTEN HOLY WELL ?

Angela Aylward, St Tudy History Group 2018

Revised 2021

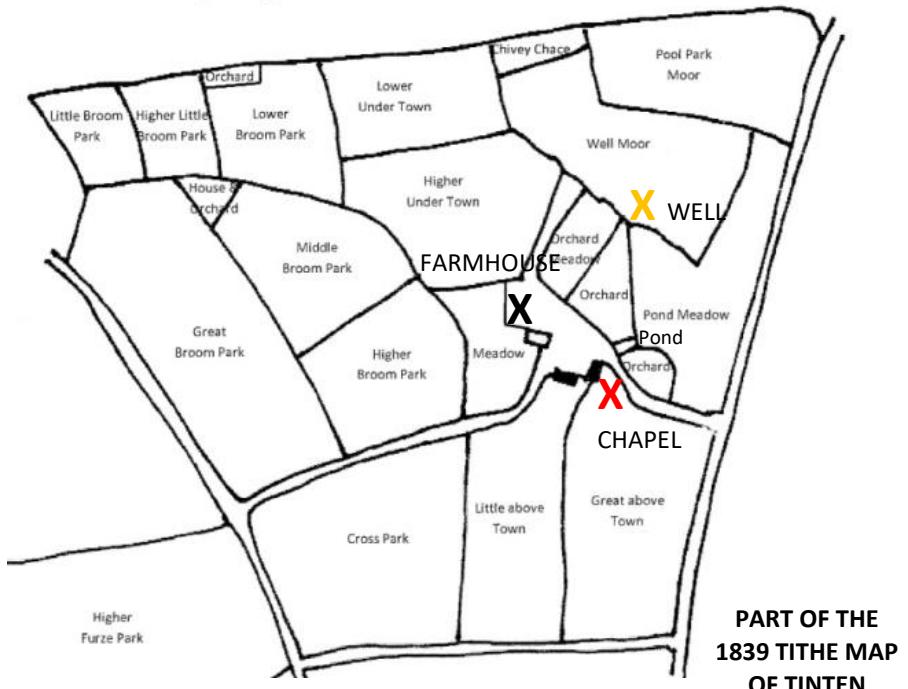
## INTRODUCTION

Whilst researching the Duchy Manor of Tinten, St Tudy, at British History Online, I found a reference to a 'St John's Well' in the record of the lease of Tinten Barton to John Bligh in 1682. The Research Team had been recording wells in the village so we decided to try and find St John's Well at Tinten.

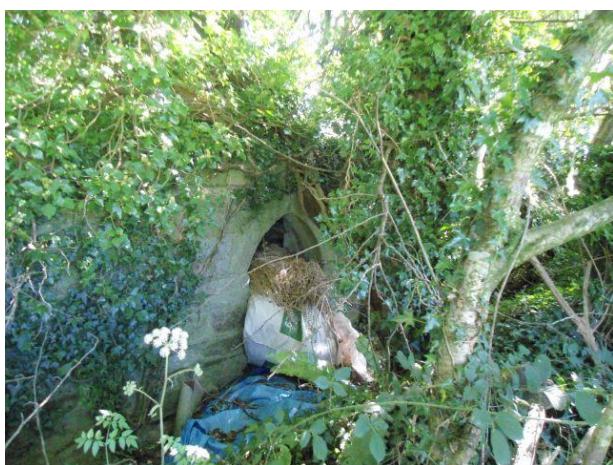
## INVESTIGATION

By relating the field names in 1682 to those on the 1839 Tithe map, the probable site of St John's Well was determined, and a visit to the site was arranged. It seemed that the well was across the fields, at some distance from the farmhouse.

Accordingly, on the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> September 2018, Pam Free and I met Angela Hocking of Tinten Farm and she kindly took us down the field to the copse where the well was thought to be.



After hacking through the undergrowth, imagine our amazement and delight to find a stone built well house, at the edge of a pool, built in a style suggesting that it could possibly be medieval in date. To Angela Hocking, this was just the housing for the farm's water supply, but to us it was much more significant.....perhaps we had found an unrecorded Holy Well!



FIRST VIEW OF THE WELL



DOOR



'WEST' WINDOW

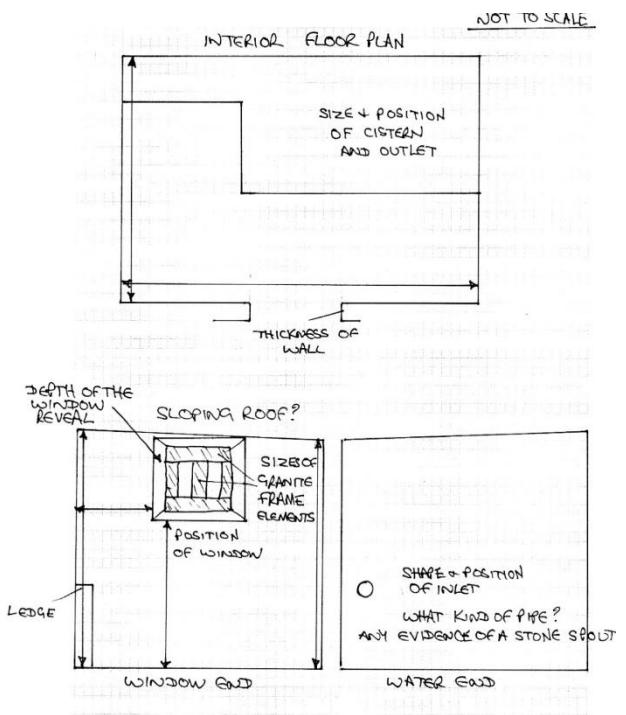
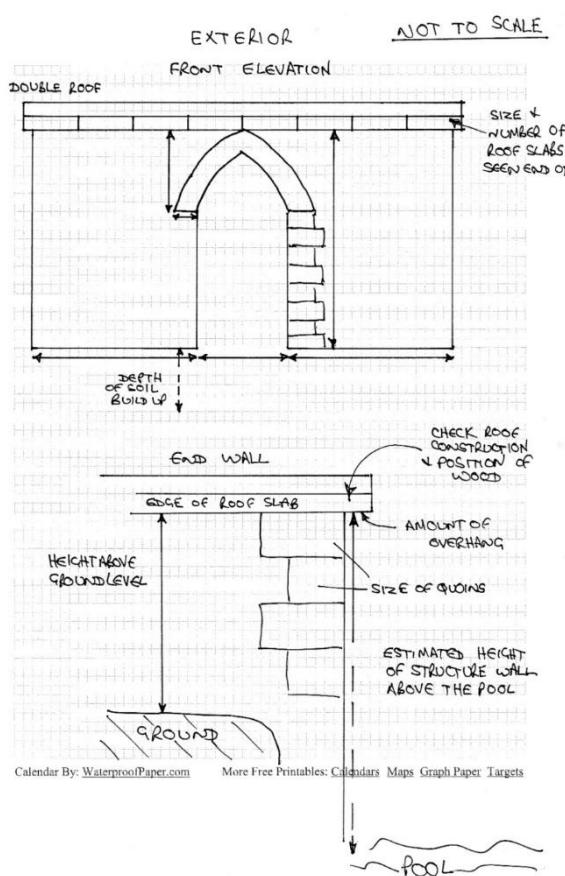


The water issues from a pipe on the right of this photo, and never fails even in the driest of summers.

It is still the main water supply to the farm, being electrically pumped from a stainless steel tub standing in the granite cistern.

An overflow channel runs off to the left.

## PRELIMINARY SKETCHES OF THE STRUCTURE



We shared our find with other members of the History Group so we could decide what to do next, and we came up with a threefold plan, as follows:

- Organise a work party to make a detailed record of the structure with better photographs and accurate measurements

The work party duly donned wellies and worked at the site on October 11<sup>th</sup>. Phil Tizzard produced detailed drawings which will be published at a later date, and Jonathan March found evidence of water management in the form of iron pipes at some distance from the well house.

- Ask professional experts to visit and make an assessment of the site

A visit from Nick Cahill and colleagues from the Historic Environment Record was arranged for 15<sup>th</sup> November.

- To continue researching books and maps for further references to the well

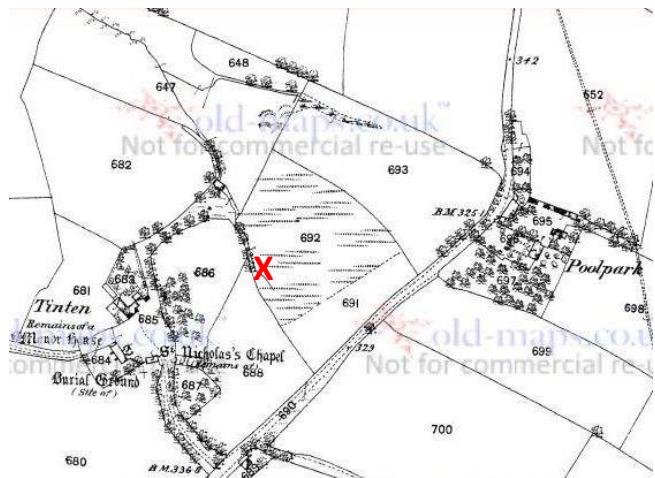
No references to a Holy Well at Tinten were found in any of the following publications which recorded local history, including Holy Wells at other places.

Magna Britannia, Cornwall 1814; Parochial History of Trigg Minor 1873; Ancient & Holy Wells of Cornwall 1894

Ordnance Survey maps of 1950 and 1881 showed the positions of St Nicholas' Chapel with the site of a Burial Ground in the field behind it. The 'Remains of a Manor House' were also indicated near the Chapel, but no well , holy or otherwise, marked anywhere nearby.



1907 OS MAP

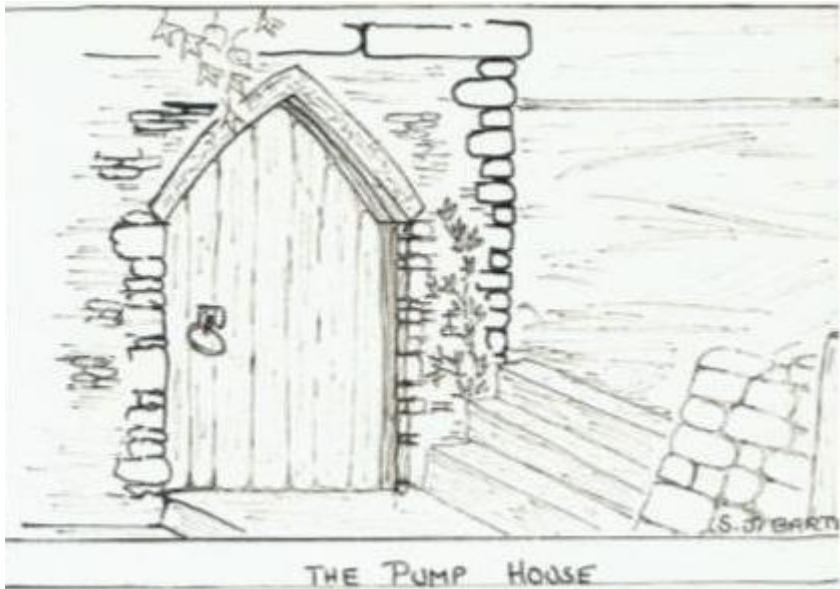


1881 OS MAP

THE WELL IS NOT MARKED ALTHOUGH OTHER ANTIQUITIES ARE SHOWN

It seemed that St John's Well had been forgotten .....

EXCEPT for the following extracts from the W I Scrapbook written by local ladies in 1951.



posts. The Pump house (above.) is in the field opposite the Chapel. It was built by Mr John Bastard in 1881, and great care was taken to build it so that it harmonised with the old Chapel. It contains a water-wheel which operates the water-supply. This comes from the Spring which was originally the holy well attached to the Chapel. This was on the side of the road opposite the Chapel, but was, unfortunately, built in when the alterations were made. Mr Wadge, the present tenant, gave us permission to look over the premises, and we thank him for the privilege of viewing this ancient and historic building. MARCH 1951  
S.J. BASTARD

**SO** – we waited for the HER's visit with some trepidation to see if the well house was, in fact, medieval or built in 1881 in a medieval style.

The weather was kind on the morning of November 15<sup>th</sup> when four staff from the Historic Environment Record team came to Tinten to look at the structure in the woods. Accompanied by Angela Hocking and Jonathan, they set off across the field to do their assessment, after which they enthusiastically tramped around the field sloping down from the B3266 to the copse, looking at the wider landscape with its bumps and hollows.

The conclusion was that there had been planned water management here over the centuries, of which the pool, culverts and leats were all part - although dating would be difficult.

The pool itself is not shown on OS maps until 1907, and a waterwheel is indicated at some distance from, but linked to it, suggesting that the present pond was created around the turn of century, perhaps to operate farm machinery by water power. No evidence was found for the waterwheel other than a level grassy platform on ground marginally higher than the streamlet/leat.

References to the well, however, predate 1900 as St John's Well was documented in 1682, and the field name Well Moor was recorded in 1839.

It could be that a natural pool existed beforehand and this may be reflected in the name of the nearby tenement, Pool Park. Oliver Padel kindly furnished us with an early record of this English name, *Polep'ke* 1532, but suggests that it could be as early as 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> century.

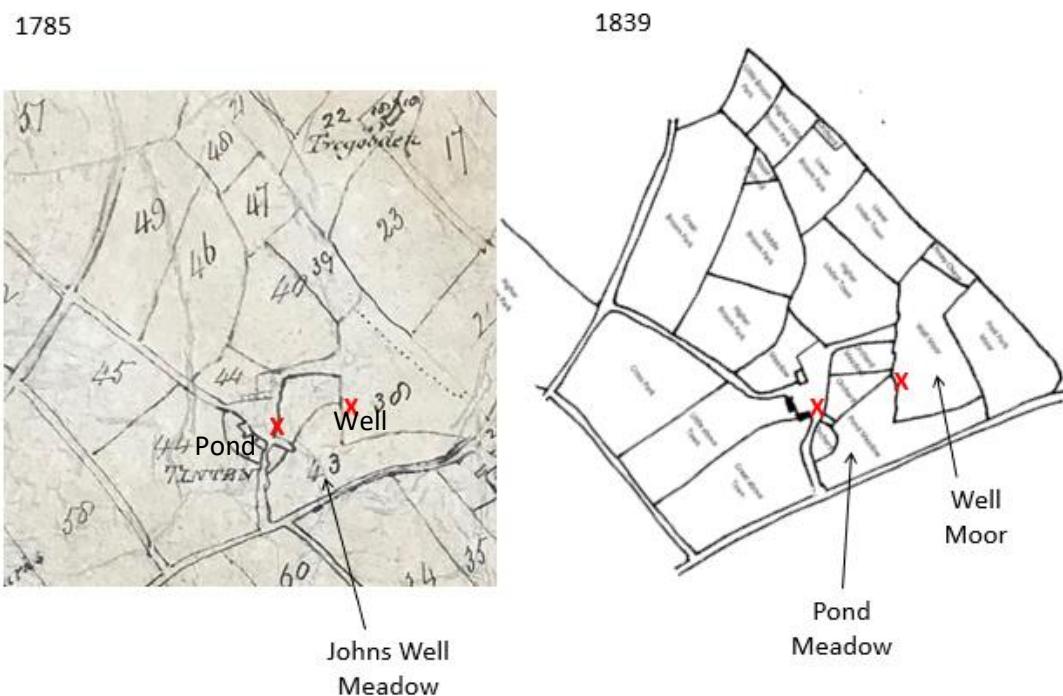
Back up the hill, then, to look at the farm and its older outbuildings, and to see St Nicholas' Chapel, built before 1330.

After much discussion, Nick Cahill from HER confirmed that the structure was most probably built in 1881 and the same time that additions were made to the farmhouse. However, the well house was built re-using medieval/post medieval elements from another building, and was built on the foundations of an earlier structure.

The window and the door arch could have come from the chapel - although the stone is of a different type, or from the original medieval manor house which no longer stands. There is much worked stone lying in the hedge behind the chapel which could also be from the manor house, suggesting that this was sited away from the present farmhouse and nearer to the chapel.

On the question of the water source being St John's Well, a holy well - Nick would only say that it might be the St John's Well referred to in 1682, and which is reputed to be a holy well associated with the chapel.

AND THIS IS WHERE THE 'STORY SO FAR' WOULD HAVE ENDED except that we then received further information from the Duchy of Cornwall's archivist, in reply to a request for information sent a couple of months before.



She kindly sent a map of Tinten from a Duchy survey carried out in 1785, together with details of the tenants and a list of the field names and sizes.

The Manor Farm of Tinten was still leased by the Bligh family and had been since they were first granted tenancy in 1682, and the map showed a field named Johns Well Meadow, numbered 43 above.

As it's a MEADOW, it's most probable that this is the 'close of meadow near St John's Well' referred to in the lease of 1682, and not field 38 which is named Tinten Moor in 1785 and Well Moor in 1839.

## IN CONCLUSION

Although we can't say for sure that we HAVE discovered an unrecorded medieval holy well in the woods, field name evidence and tradition suggest that St John's Well WAS here somewhere, centuries before the present pool was constructed, and what we DID find is worth recording and protecting.

Evidence from the 1785 map confirms the existence of 'John's Well' but doesn't help to pinpoint its location. It could still be either the pond opposite St Nicholas' Chapel or the well in the copse. The discovery and subsequent recording of the Victorian well house, however, proved to be a very enjoyable and worthwhile project for the Research Team.

Further work may investigate the industrial archaeology of water management at the site – and trying to find exactly where the water to the Pump House comes from. We need to take a closer look, also, at the site of the pond opposite the chapel and perhaps try to find the Mansion House.

None of this work would have been possible without the full co-operation and support of Chris and Angela at Tinten, and we thank them very much for allowing us to make our investigations.