

Mary Tavy



Conservation Area Character Appraisal



Dartmoor National Park Authority January 2011

Conservation Areas were introduced through the *Civic Amenities Act 1967*. Section 69 (1) (a) of the Act gives the definition of 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'

There are now over 9,000 Conservation Areas nation-wide. Local Planning Authorities are required to designate Conservation Areas, keep them under review, and if appropriate, designate further areas (Section 69 (2)). There are currently 23 Conservation Areas within Dartmoor National Park.

Designation brings certain duties to local planning authorities:

- ◆ to formulate and publish from time to time proposals for the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas and submit them for consideration to a public meeting in the area to which they relate (Section 71)
- ◆ in exercising their planning powers, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Areas (Section 72).

Conservation Area Character Appraisals aim to define and analyse the special interest which constitutes the character and appearance of a place. It is these qualities which warrant the designation of a Conservation Area.

An appraisal will provide a sound basis, defensible on appeal, for policies within the Local Development Framework and Development Management decisions. It can also form the groundwork for a subsequent **Conservation Area Management Plan**, which will contain defined issues, proposals and policies for the conservation and enhancement of the area. It is also intended that the document will be helpful to those involved in drawing up Enhancement Projects and Village Design Statements within the National Park area.

The main function of the Conservation Area Character Appraisal is to enable Dartmoor National Park Authority and the community to relate planning proposals to the Conservation Area.

Defining the character of an area is not a straightforward exercise and it is not always possible to reach a truly objective view. The statement of character and appearance in this appraisal is based on various detailed methods of analysis recommended by English Heritage. A range of qualities are looked at including: historical development, building materials, and relationships between buildings and open spaces. However, character appraisals are not intended to be fully comprehensive and any omission does not imply that something is of no interest.

This Character Appraisal has benefited from several public consultations which have taken place through the Parish Council.

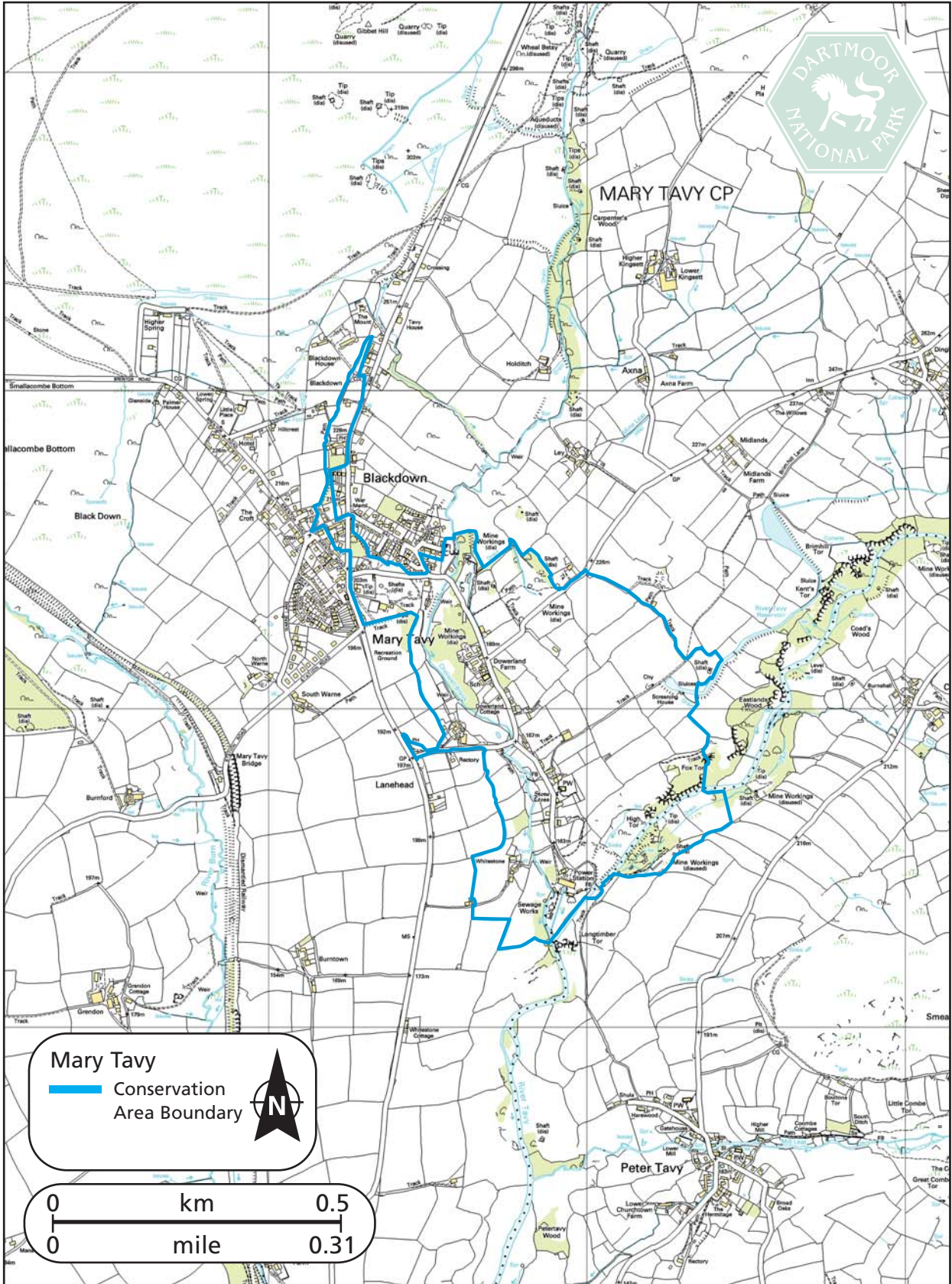
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Map 1 Conservation Area Location



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Introduction

Mary Tavy is located about 4 miles north east of Tavistock. It is a loosely developed village covering a large area and divided into two distinct settlements – Mary Tavy and Blackdown. They are both integral to the historic development of the place and they are interspersed with the mine workings for which Mary Tavy is best known.

The older part of the village is formed of scattered farmsteads and cottages following a north-south axis along the valley of the Cholwell Brook. By contrast Blackdown is sited on the ridge with a close association to the road between Tavistock and Okehampton.

The underlying geology is complex; being on the edge of the granite mass there are a range of metamorphic and intrusive igneous rocks evident in the fabric of the place, as well as granite. The economic value presented to the location by its geological heritage is evident throughout the settlements in the form of ruined mine buildings and spoil tips. Copper was the main product but tin, silver and other minerals were worked in the area at times.

This document offers an assessment of the ‘special architectural and historic interest’ of Mary Tavy and proposes a boundary for the designation of a Conservation Area. The distinctive social history of the place and its associated industrial archaeology is considered an essential element of the character. Although excluded from the World Heritage site inscription, the special interest of Mary Tavy is worthy of similar attention to the mining sites that are included in the World Heritage designation.

1 Village History

There has been habitation in the vicinity of Mary Tavy since the Bronze Age, so it can be assumed that there has been human influence for 3500 years or more. It is tempting to think that a major attraction of many Bronze Age settlers was the presence of copper and tin – the constituents of bronze. The mineral wealth of the moorland fringe may have been an influence on human settlement and activity since the earliest times. These early settlers were also farmers and that also had a significant impact on the landscape.

For the early part of its history Mary Tavy seems to have been a quiet, primarily agricultural settlement. The older part of the village was probably quite similar to today throughout the centuries after the building of the church. It is from the dedication of the church that the village takes its name.

An important possible 13th century archaeological feature which can still be seen in Blackdown is the King Way, so called as it was the Tavistock to Okehampton section of the route between London to Plymouth along which the King's Mail was taken, the King is believed to be Charles I. By 1720 a regular post service had been established along the route.

Stretches of its route can be traced from Tavistock and north towards Wilminstone and Wringworthy. It crossed the river Burn entering Mary Tavy at Warne Lane, running up through the village and out onto Blackdown, Lydford and Vale Down where a long section which bounds the route is called the King's Wall. It continued across Sourton, South Down and Vellake, running down into Meldon along King's Lane. Surviving sections of the route are apparent on the early editions of the OS map and importantly still on the ground throughout Blackdown.

In the centuries after the Norman Conquest the parish passed through successive ownerships without leaving any tangible traces other than the church itself. The greater part of the land at Mary Tavy was owned by the Buller family through its boom years until the 20th century, but there were other independent freeholders.

As well as the usual collection of farmhouses, barns and cottages, there also appears to have been a mill. White's Directory of 1850 lists two corn millers amongst the tradesmen of the village. The mill was presumably of some antiquity when it was shown on the Tithe Map as the buildings had gone by the time of the first OS Map, though the leat remained and can still be traced. The location of the mill was immediately adjacent to the power station and is evidence of long continuity of water power in Mary Tavy. Mill stones are being used as the steps into the Power Station.

The earliest reference to mining is that of Wheal Friendship which appears in 1740. This was the best known and richest copper mine on Dartmoor with a longer history than any other in Devon or Cornwall, working from most probably the late seventeenth century until 1925. By the 1840s the mine possessed 17 waterwheels, 8 for pumping, 4 for hoisting, the remainder for crushing etc. The largest, Buller's Wheel, was 50ft in diameter. Worked by 11 shafts the site was extensive; by 1870 copper production declined in favour of arsenic and together with tin, formed the main output up to its final closure in 1925. Tin production came mainly from the Bennett's and Brenton's section below the 112 fm level.

In 1880 the mine was renamed Devon Friendship and work was concentrated on the new Bennett's shaft. The head gear was removed from here in the 1940s and the shaft filled in the 1960s

John Taylor

In 1798 a young mining engineer named John Taylor arrived from Norwich to take over the management of Wheal Friendship. He applied his considerable mining skill to the sinking of his 'Taylors Shaft' which reached approximately 960 feet deep. The shaft was served by a wheel located within the property called Midtors and connected to the shaft by a system of flat-rods, conveying the power to pumps de-watering the shaft. Today Rods Lane occupies some 50m of the course of the flat rods. Taylor also engineered the building of the Wheal Friendship leat which took its water from the river Tavy, followed the contour of Kingsett Down and discharged into the Cholwell Brook from which the augmented flow provided water for numerous leats to the many waterwheels. Taylor also constructed the Wheal Jewell leat as well as other leats which conveyed water to Wheal Betsy silver and lead mine and to the Black Down Mine. He was also responsible for the construction of the Tavistock Canal.

Taylor was keen to alleviate some of the hardship of the workers. He introduced a token system that would be used as currency on the all too frequent occasions when the money to pay workers was delayed. These 'Tavistock tokens' could be used in local establishments and then cashed in by the traders at the Count House when money arrived. Whilst the system surely helped in some ways there can be little doubt that it helped also to bind workers to the local mines. By the 1860's the conditions for miners in Mary Tavy were being favourably compared to other mining settlements in a report to the Royal Commission on Mines. One facility which helped to improve the miners' lot, albeit added quite late in the mining history of Mary Tavy, was the 'miners dry'. This offered the underground workers somewhere warm to leave a change of clothes and to clean up after a long shift. The example at Bennett's Shaft is still a feature but it is now roofless and neglected.

The latter part of the 19th century saw increased competition from around the world where ores could be exploited much more economically. As happened with the Cornish industry, a significant number of Devon miners headed across the globe in search of their fortunes. A few made it, many died trying and others eventually found their way home with stories to tell.

The remains of the mining industry have been largely erased, or at least softened, over the second half of the 20th century. In the urge to undo an industrial landscape seen as ugly a great deal has been lost without record. Since the 1960s many of the mining dumps have been removed for hard core and the whole area has become densely overgrown and inaccessible. It is very desirable that the remaining physical evidence is recorded as well and as soon as possible and that archive material is accessed and used.



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Fig 1: A typical example of the 18th century houses in Mary Tavy

Another notable feature of the Tithe Map of 1841 is that there appears to be relatively little development in the village compared with today, especially in Blackdown. Yet White's Directory of 1850 puts the population at 1,552, most of who were employed in mining. Perhaps these people were scattered and crammed into the small number of dwellings apparent; or maybe a more likely scenario is that a significant percentage lived in shacks and hovels that were of such a temporary and illegitimate nature that they went unrecorded. There are houses that may have belonged to some of the Mine Captains or other senior workers – usually double fronted robust but comfortable dwellings. The directors and shareholders, who controlled the wealth of the mines, including William Morris, lived elsewhere and the mining history of Mary Tavy reflects the transience of capital.

The great influx of migrant workers in the 19th century swelled the population and that suited the landowners and mine operators. There were, however, no guarantees that the mines would continue to be economic and anyway, the welfare and housing of the poor workers was of little concern to the shareholders and directors. Housing conditions at the time were bad for the rural poor generally, but to envisage the lot of those working the mines one has to imagine the scenes of any other shanty town associated with mass economic migrancy. In the mid 19th century Mary Tavy was a boomtown where fortunes were made but many lived lives in a cycle of hardship, danger and poverty.

The Count House, (now called Glebe Cottage), is a most important survival as it was from a balcony here that contracts were made with the Tut and Tribute teams by a kind of Dutch auction that ensured competition between workers and cheap deals for the mine owners. It is the most tangible reminder of the way in which the economic activity of the mines was organised.



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Fig 2: The Power Station

As with many mining communities there were non-conformist chapels, two Wesleyan and one Bible Christian. The listed Wesleyan Chapel in Chapel Lane is located within the Conservation Area.

As the mining industry slipped away from Mary Tavy a further adaptation of the copious water power available was beginning. The hydro-electric power station made use of the redundant leats that had powered water wheels to pump out the mines. Constructed in 1932 it soon expanded and has the capacity now to provide power to 5,000 homes. It is a fine example of how the traditional and environmentally sustainable power source of Devon can be harnessed to meet contemporary needs with minimal visual intrusion. The fact that it is still an exception, despite its success, makes it part of the special historic character of Mary Tavy. Whilst the power station is not remarkable in global terms – it used tried and trusted technology even at the time of construction – it is significant in UK terms and for many years was the most productive HEP plant in the country.