

Case Study - Heritage Counts 2015

Cornish Buildings Group Annual Awards 2015

The Cornish Buildings Group Awards Scheme is the County's most prestigious architectural prize celebrating excellence in areas of architectural design and applied conservation and restoration work: it is the 'Oscars' of building awards in Cornwall. Every year the CBG's Council considers a broad range of project types ranging from radical modern designs to small and large-scale repairs and renovations, all of which reflect a high degree of dedication on the part of the owners of the buildings, and the professional advisers with whom they work.

As judges the Group offer wide ranging experience in many aspects of Cornish architecture and architectural practice including conservation, design, environment, heritage, planning and research. The Group evaluates the quality of design or conservation philosophy, assesses the suitability of materials, appropriateness of the solution to context and the overall impact of the building. Entries that build on Cornish precedent or take such precedents forward in a courageous and aesthetically pleasing manner are particularly valued. This lively and vigorous process ensures that the Award scheme maintains its position as a true mark of excellence.

Awards were given in 2015 to two buildings, firstly, Maer Barn, near Bude, an outstanding barn conversion and an exemplar of how conservation, restoration and contemporary design can work easily together to transform a redundant agricultural building to a remarkable family home and, secondly, Trenethick Barton, near Wendron, a most sensitive restoration of a Tudor gatehouse and barbican.



Maer Barn, Bude (Eric Berry/Cornish Buildings Group ©)

Sympathetically converting and re-using redundant historic buildings is always difficult to get right. Maer Barn however made it look easy. This was no ordinary barn conversion – its success was based on a cohesive and happy union between owner, architect and building, the obvious consequence being a maturity in applied conservation practice and a brave approach to design. Maer Barn presented a number of serious conservation challenges. The Grade II* listed complex comprised a mediaeval barn, including four bays of a cruck framed roof – a rare survival in Cornwall – and a later eighteenth or early nineteenth barn; both barns being derelict and at risk. The restoration involved careful repair of the medieval cruck-framed roof, reconstruction of the eighteenth/nineteenth century barn with a new contemporary link building containing a new entrance and stairway.

The mediaeval cruck frame dominates the first floor living accommodation creating a sense of drama. Alongside it the new spacious entrance hall with handsome bespoke staircase situated beneath a theatrical glass roof, which connects the two barns. The lower eighteenth/nineteenth century end draws on traditional materials such as stone, slate and timber, a combination that successfully creates a contemporary open living space that is both exciting and sensitive. Outside new garden walls and an enchanting summer house take on a Scottish vernacular feel which complements the overall aesthetic.

The resulting building is, first and foremost, a family home, secure in that use for many generations to come. However, the aspiration and dedication of the clients and thoughtful work of the architectural team had the added benefit of removing two neglected barns from Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register, once again made the building worthy of its Grade II* listed status.



Trenethick Barton Gatehouse, Wendron (Eric Berry/Cornish Buildings Group ©)

What do you do with a Grade I listed Tudor gatehouse that is falling down? The obvious answer is to restore it. However, as is all too often seen, this it is not always as straightforward as it might first appear. The ingredients for a successful restoration of a historic building are first, a dedicated owner, second, time and commitment and third,

support. At Trenethick Barton these elements all came together to successfully breathe fresh life into one of Cornwall's most important domestic buildings.

The main house, gatehouse and barbican at Trenethick are all Grade I listed structures. They stand in front of the handsome barton house, providing a semi fortified and formal approach to the house, a feature found in a number of Cornish gentry houses. The gatehouse at Trenethick had developed major subsidence problems, with the front wall of the upper chamber becoming detached from the main structure, leaning alarmingly and threatening to collapse. The only way of resolving the problem was to dismantle the roof and front wall of the gatehouse and to rebuild them both, stone by stone, tying the wall back to the main structure.

The real joy of this restoration is that it was done sympathetically, reusing elements of the original building and only adding new traditional materials when absolutely necessary. There is no explicit gain for an owner in this sort of situation, other than the intense satisfaction of knowing that they have rescued an important part of the national heritage and secured the future of an important structure. Luckily, in this case, the committed owner was prepared to undertake an heroic conservation project and to act quickly to cure a very serious problem that could have robbed Cornwall of a very fine and historically important structure.

Trenethick Barton gatehouse is absolute proof of what can be achieved by an enthusiastic and committed owner. This exemplary restoration has also resulted in a very important historic structure being removed from Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register.

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