

# SANCREED WELL

SW 4180 2935 [OS Maps Explorer 102; Landranger 203]

## LOCATION

Sancreed Well (also known as Chapel Downs) can be found near to the small hamlet of Sancreed in the centre of the West Penwith peninsula.



## ACCESS

From Penzance take the A30 towards Land's End. About a mile past the B3283 turning to St. Buryan you will see a small turn on your right that leads to Sancreed. At Sancreed you can park beside the Church and a public path from the telephone box opposite leads to the well.

If you are coming from St. Just, take the A3071 towards Penzance and just past the turn to Sennen take the next right to Sancreed. When you get to Sancreed Beacon there is a large lay-by where cars may be parked. A few yards further on, on the opposite side of the road, a permissive path leads to the well.

## DESCRIPTION

Sancreed holy well lies in a pine and holly grove, and steps lead deeply down into a womb-like chamber, covered with corbelled stone walls and roof. There is now a relatively shallow level of water, though in recent times it was at a much higher level: something seems to have affected the water table, reducing the height of the water. Nevertheless, the water is still clear and cold, and the surrounding moss often shines with a phosphorescent glow, giving the whole site a very magical grotto-like feel. The well, which probably originally dates from pre-Christian times, was lost and buried in thick undergrowth for a number of years, but was re-discovered by the Vicar of Sancreed in 1879, and subsequently kept cleared by a Juliette Shanks, who has a plaque dedicated to her on the site. The remains of an early Chapel lie behind the well, with a large 15th century carved stone in one corner, which may have originally formed part of an arch. A modern Christian cross designed in a Celtic fashion stands next to it.

## FOLKLORE & LEGEND

Attached to the trees nearby there are often 'clouties' or pieces of rags left hanging. This was a traditional custom at healing wells, whereby rags were torn from part of the body where there was injury or hurt and tied on a tree close to the well. As the material disintegrated (most materials were biodegradable) so the hurt was supposed to go. Nowadays, the rags are probably hung by people for good luck. Sancreed Church, and thus by implication the well, is dedicated to St. Credan, a mythological saint who in the old texts supposedly accidentally killed his father and became a swineherd in penance. Sancreed Church has a carving of him holding a pig above the porch door. In Celtic mythology pigs were totem animals of the Otherworld, and swineherds often have an initiatory significance, representing contact with the Otherworld. Whether a coincidence or not, this legend seems to be particularly apposite at this well that seems to lead down into the Underworld.

## PURPOSE AND MEANING

Holy Wells like Sancreed would originally have been a source of fresh water for people, and came to be venerated for the 'genus loci' or spirit of the place who was thought to dwell there. Later, under Christianity, they often became dedicated to saints, and continued to be visited as sacred and healing places.

**Go to page 2 for details of other sites in the area.**

**PLEASE TREAT THIS SITE WITH RESPECT & LEAVE NO LITTER OR OFFERINGS.**

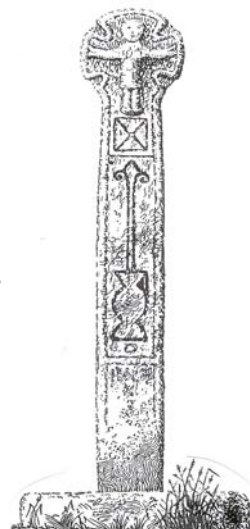
**IF YOU DECIDE TO TIE A CLOTH TO THE TREE PLEASE ENSURE IT IS APPROPRIATE.  
IF YOU FIND ANY DAMAGE OR VANDALISM PLEASE PHONE 01736-787186 OR 787522**

# OTHER SITES NEAR TO SANCREED WELL

## **SANCREED CHURCH & CROSSES** SW 4203 2935

**LOCATION & ACCESS** As to the Holy Well from Penzance on page 1.

**DESCRIPTION & MEANING** There was probably a sacred site here from the earliest Celtic period, and the Church itself was referred to in 12th century documents, though most of the extant building dates from the 15th century. There are the remains of 5 Celtic crosses or cross-heads in the churchyard, including two full-length decorated ones, one by the church wall by the south porch, and the other [illustrated right by A.G.Langdon in 1896] a few feet away close to the SW entrance. Celtic crosses such as these probably date from about the 8th-14th centuries and were often set up on trackways leading to the churches.



## **SANCREED BEACON** SW 414 295

**LOCATION & ACCESS** From Sancreed walk or drive up the hill from the Church and take the turning left (sign-posted to St.Just). After about 500 yds you will see Sancreed Beacon on the right. If you have come from St.Just, you will have parked here to visit Sancreed Well.

**DESCRIPTION & MEANING** Sancreed Beacon is one of a number of 'holy hilltops' in this area: others nearby are Caer Bran, Bartinney and Chapel Carn Brea [available as a downloadable leaflet]. Sancreed Beacon is 184m (603ft) high, and consists of a small but beautiful hill, smooth-shaped from a fairly flat summit plateau, on which two cairns sit (SW 4142 2949 & SW 4143 2945), both unexcavated and now in a rather ruined and overgrown condition. Nevertheless, their location and setting is important: they may be considered as places of ritual and ceremony, especially as both cairns seem to be focussed on natural rocky outcrops (carns), so that their builders seem to have involved a reverence for the living rock in their ideology and in their ritual. There is also another ruined cairn on the W flank.

## **BRANE BARROW** SW 4014 2818

**LOCATION & ACCESS** From Sancreed drive back towards the A30. After about a mile you will come to a turning to Carn Euny. Take this to Brane farm, where you may park with permission. The Barrow lies in a field south of the farm, and you should ask permission at the farm to visit it.

**DESCRIPTION & MEANING** This is a well-preserved Neolithic/Bronze Age entrance grave, similar to those at Tregiffian (near the Merry Maidens stone circle), Bosiliack (near Lanyon Quoit) and Chapel Carn Brea and Balowall Barrow [all available as downloadable leaflets]. At Brane both the passage and the kerbed mound are intact. The chamber is 2.3m (7½ft) long, 1.2m (4ft) wide and 0.9m (3ft) high. The mound itself is 6.1m (20ft) in diameter and 2.1m (7ft) high. Its entrance faces SE, the direction of the rising midwinter sun, and identical to Bosiliack Barrow. It is thought that this was done in order for ceremonial rites to take place, linking the power of the rebirth of the sun God/dess with the spirits of the dead ancestors.



***When you return to Brane Farm, you can continue along the road for about ½ a mile to Carn Euny Settlement & Fogou - details available as a separate downloadable leaflet.***

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