

A blend of history & ingenuity



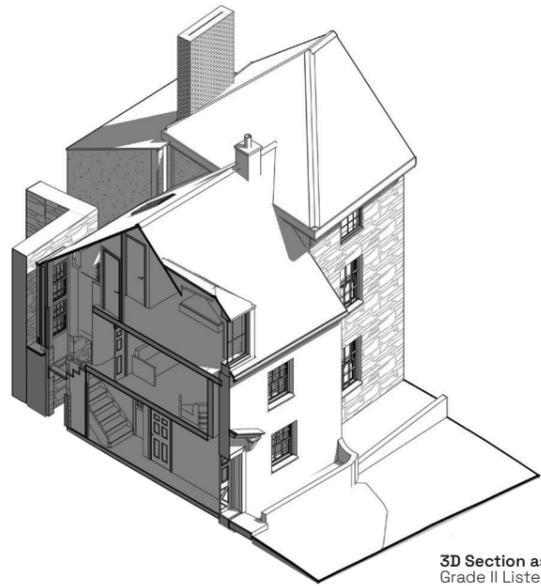
Polkirt Hill:
Cornwall's past
and future

Beauty in the unexpected



“The original brief was to renovate a neglected seaside townhouse that had recently been purchased as a second home for a family. At the time, it had no functioning kitchen or bathroom, so the main goal was to restore and modernise the property, but we needed to preserve the historic character. Along the way, we discovered some genuinely surprising and unique features.”

Samantha Hamilton, Partner at Rowett Architecture



3D Section as Proposed
Grade II Listed Townhouse

Breathing new life into a historic townhouse

29 Polkirt Hill is a Grade II-listed townhouse in the Cornish village of Mevagissey. Built in the early 18th century, the house had undergone extensive modernisation over the years, but with this sympathetic restoration by St Austell-based Rowett Architecture, the house's stunning original features are lovingly restored and presented in all their glory.

The sensitive renovation places renewed emphasis on the materials, texture and craftsmanship that form the distinctive character of this historic property, while adding two bedrooms in the long-forgotten attic and flooding the house with natural light. The result is a home that's perfectly suited to its role as a welcoming coastal retreat: as timeless as it is fresh.

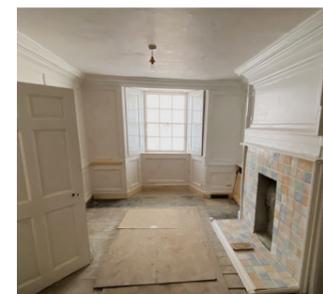


Heritage and conservation

Based in St Austell, Rowett Architecture is a RIBA Chartered Practice with over 35 years of experience. The practice works across a broad range of projects, from private homes and extensions to commercial developments, but is gaining a reputation for its conservation work.

With a deep knowledge of Cornwall's architectural heritage, Rowett Architecture has become adept at navigating the complexities of listed buildings with care and sensitivity. Their approach balances historic integrity with contemporary convenience, ensuring each project serves both its past and its present.

Conservation philosophy and methodology



The restoration of Polkirt Hill property was guided by a “minimal intervention” philosophy, prioritising the preservation of authentic materials and features. Every intervention was carefully considered for its reversibility and compatibility with the building’s historic fabric.

Traditional materials, such as lath and earth/lime plaster, were retained or reinstated wherever possible, and modern services were sensitively integrated to avoid damaging original elements. This approach ensures that the building’s story remains legible, balancing the needs of contemporary living with respect for its past.



A complex collaboration

As work began, the team quickly realised the project would be more intricate than initially thought. Early investigations uncovered an extraordinary 18th-century painting hidden beneath years of subsequent re-decorations, dramatically shifting the scope of work.

“We uncovered this Renaissance-style painting on timber panelling, which changed everything,” explains Samantha Hamilton, the project’s lead architect. “To preserve it, we had to collaborate closely with the Heritage Officer and adjust the client’s budget, and their expectations.”

The discovery led to detailed paint analysis, which informed the room’s eventual palette, a sage green shade believed to match the original colour.

Throughout the project, collaboration was key. Structural engineers with conservation expertise were brought in to sensitively reinforce the roof, introducing a discreet steel ridge beam while preserving and showcasing the existing timber trusses. The roofline was adjusted slightly to accommodate structural needs, without compromising the building’s silhouette.



Tech insights: Material analysis

“We preserved the original timber beams and panelling carefully, ensuring all modern services like heating and electricals were sensitively installed so as not to damage these features.”

The conservation process was underpinned by rigorous scientific analysis. Paint stratigraphy was examined using cross-section microscopy, revealing up to 18 distinct decorative schemes on the panelling. Pigment identification confirmed the use of Prussian blue and French ultramarine in early wallpapers, while the survival of lath and earth/lime plaster demonstrated traditional construction techniques. These findings not only informed restoration decisions but also contribute valuable knowledge to the wider architectural community.



Going with the flow

Throughout the house, the focus remained on working within the existing layout. Light wells were retained and repurposed for storage, allowing daylight to continue filtering through while enhancing their functionality.



"We didn't really change the layout; we worked with the existing rooms and improved their flow"

Samantha Hamilton, Partner at Rowett Architecture





The ground floor now features restored timber floors, reinstated panelling and a carefully updated kitchen and dining area that showcases the original beams and chimney openings. The attic, once a forgotten space, has been transformed into two comfortable bedrooms, with VELUX Heritage conservation roof windows ensuring it feels airy and connected to the surroundings.

“VELUX were very helpful in providing the level of detail I needed to make the windows as discreet as possible,” says Samantha Hamilton. “In this kind of project, it’s not just about the light, it’s crucial that the roof windows integrate with the historic fabric.”



Sympathetic interventions

Light was a crucial element of the transformation, particularly in the attic, which was previously a dark, underused space. With their discreet design and excellent thermal performance, VELUX Heritage Conservation Roof Windows were the ideal solution.

The new VELUX Heritage conservation roof windows not only fill the attic with natural light but also provide glimpses of Mevagissey harbour, creating a bright, welcoming space that has become one of the most-used areas in the house.



Heritage impact and policy awareness

All interventions were assessed for their impact on the building's heritage value, its setting within a group of listed houses, and the wider Mevagissey Conservation Area. The project followed best-practice guidance from Historic England and local policy, ensuring that changes, such as the installation of VELUX Heritage conservation roof windows and the use of lime render, enhanced the building's longevity and significance without compromising its character. This thoughtful, policy-aware approach demonstrates how sensitive adaptation can secure the future of historic buildings.

Stories of the past, present and future

“This has been one of the most interesting projects I’ve worked on, largely due to the historical stories encapsulated in the property,” Samantha reflects.



“It’s about finding a dialogue between past and present, retaining key historic elements while allowing for future adaptations that bring the building back to life sustainably.”

The house now seamlessly blends its centuries-old history with modern comfort, allowing it to remain a relevant part of modern Cornwall, while honouring its past.



Details that matter

The restoration celebrated the building's craftsmanship: from the handmade nails in panelling and original joinery to the chronology of wallpapers on cupboard doors. Annotated plans and historic photographs documented the evolution of the house, while technical diagrams illustrated the conservation process. These details, often overlooked, are what made this property at Polkirt Hill a case study in both architectural heritage and the art of sensitive restoration.

Project data

Client: Private
Architect: Samantha Hamilton, Rowett Architecture, St. Austell
Location: Mevagissey, Cornwall UK
Photography: Pip Hambling



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