



Unearthing West Cornwall's Bronze-Age past while paving its modern future

With two Yanmar SV60-6B mini excavators, contractor John Williams is shaping West Cornwall's future while uncovering relics of its ancient history. As he delivers modern housing developments to the local community, his work has unexpectedly revealed long-buried traces of the region's rich tin mining heritage, dating back to the Bronze Age.

Cornwall, renowned for its rugged coastline and rich industrial history, was once a global center for tin mining. Remnants of this past still dot the landscape, with landmarks such as the Geevor Tin Mine standing as testaments to the region's mining heritage. In this historically rich setting, local contractor John Williams is building homes with the help of two Yanmar SV60-6B mini excavators, while also uncovering hidden relics of Cornwall's past – blending the region's metalworking and archaeological heritage with its modern-day development.

Building the future

In a region where the land holds centuries of industrial history, John's most ambitious project to date involves transforming a 26-house residential development. This approximately £4 million project has presented its fair share of challenges, from complex drainage systems and curbing to extensive roadwork. Throughout the two-year build, John's Yanmar SV60-6B mini excavators have been crucial, offering unparalleled versatility and reliability. "This is the biggest project I've ever taken on, but the Yanmar units have been up to the task every step of the way," John says. "I keep things simple by equipping the SV60-6Bs with just a bucket and a curb lifter. With these attachments, we can strip fields, excavate foundations, install drainage, place curbs, shape gardens, build patios, and even erect fences".

To meet the developer's tight deadline, John often worked through the winter months, in rain and mud, conditions that would typically challenge an excavator's stability. Thanks to its well-balanced undercarriage and weight distribution, including a large counterweight, the SV60-6B provided solid footing even on unstable ground. Its compact width (1,970 mm) made it ideal for navigating the tight spaces typical of residential sites.

Unearthing history with Yanmar

In addition to large-scale housing developments, John has used the Yanmar SV60-6B for personal projects, including building his dream home. Located in the idyllic village of Pendine, John's land revealed a hidden piece of history: five tin mine shafts, discovered beneath the foundation of the old farmhouse he was rebuilding. As he excavated the site with the SV60-6B, John uncovered layers of Cornwall's industrial past, a reminder of the region's deep-rooted mining heritage, particularly near the iconic Geevor Tin Mine.

"To build our dream home, we had to start from the ground up, which sadly meant demolishing the old farmhouse that stood on the land," John recalls. "The property had been derelict for 40 years and was in a complete state of disrepair. When we excavated about two meters down to lay the new foundation, we were amazed to uncover mine shafts – a piece of history right beneath our feet."



The mines below John's home trail toward Geevor Tin Mine, a World Heritage site that once extended far beneath the sea. Tin, first extracted from the beds of streams in Pendine during the Bronze Age, played a pivotal role in Cornwall's history. "We're fortunate to have a perfect view of Geevor Tin Mine and the Isles of Scilly from our home," John adds. The connection between John's modern-day construction and the ancient mining legacy beneath his property underscores the unique history of the region.

A trusted partnership

John's relationship with Yanmar CE began years ago through Phil Davey, owner of Machine Serve, the Yanmar dealer based in Chulmleigh, Devon, about two hours from John's site. "I had a minor issue with one of my Yanmar machines, and despite the distance Phil was on-site the same day to fix it," John says. "I've known Phil and the team for around 20 years now, and their quick, reliable service is exactly what I need when working under pressure". Machine Serve's support has been crucial to keeping John's machines running smoothly, offering routine maintenance and quick responses to any problems. This long-standing partnership has helped John grow his business while continuing to meet the demands of tight deadlines.

John Williams' housing projects are a part of Cornwall's history in the making. Whether unearthing pieces of history while building his home or laying the groundwork for new housing developments, with his trusty Yanmar excavators at his side, John is bridging the gap between Cornwall's industrial past and its modern-day growth.