# Tamar

Journal of the Friends of the Tamar Valley

Number 46 - 2024

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Cover photo: The Tamar from above Weir Quay, looking west to the Hooe peninsula, with Pentillie beyond
(Clive Charlton – with thanks to Gordon Bidlake)

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## EDITORIAL

Many thanks to all who have contributed to the 2024 edition of *Tamar* and my apologies for its late arrival - in 2025.

This edition opens with an illustrated account by Lynn Marsh and John Forster about the striking 'Saltash Ferryman' sculpture by the riverside below the Royal Albert Bridge. It 'represents all who kept the ferry running and helped to keep the Waterside alive'. Long-standing contributor to 'Tamar', Susan Pittman, gives us some delightful, intimate and personal memories of the many years she spent in the Tamar Valley and on the river, mainly in the 1970s and 1980s.

The article by Tony Tibbles highlights a little-known perspective on the history of Plymouth and the Tamar Valley by examining the Black presence in the area from the 16th to the late-19th centuries. Keith Loze and Steve Roberts have kindly allowed me to combine material originally published by the Plymouth Mining and Mineral Club that focuses on the later history of the Prince of Wales Mine, Harrowbarrow and also the colourful story of one of the last Tamar Valley miners, 'Pop' Courtis.

There follow some extracts from a journal kept, in the early 1870s, by Lady Ernestine Edgcumbe, daughter of the 3rd Earl of Mount Edgcumbe. Although she was an avid traveller and observer of the wider world, the article focuses on her adventures on and around the Tamar.

Finally, there are appreciations of two very different contributions to the literature on the Tamar Valley. One reviews Phil Barden's superb book on the moths of the Bere Peninsula, and the other draws attention to the remarkable maritime history research of the late Gary Hicks.

*After 12 years in the role, I am now stepping down as editor of Tamar. I am hugely grateful to all the authors for their knowledge and enthusiasm over this period. There are high hopes of new editorial hands for Tamar, so that the journal will continue and advance.*

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**Clive Charlton**, **Editor, *Tamar*** cliveacharlton1@outlook.com

# The Saltash Ferryman

## *John Forster and Lynn Marsh*

*For more than 900 years, men and women*
*Pulled oar, shovelled coal, countered current and hauled chain*
*To give travellers passage and to link communities,*
*Crossing and crossing and crossing and crossing.*

At the water's edge at Saltash stands a sculpture with a story to tell.

The lower Tamar has long been a busy north-south highway transporting people and goods between its many quays (most now derelict and hard to spot) or out to the seas beyond. But the river also imposes a barrier for land-based travel, east to west, especially below New Bridge at Gunnislake, where it broadens out, with tricky expanses of tidal mud. Crossing here is a challenge.

The river at what we now know as Saltash and Saltash Passage (St Budeaux) offered the best conditions in this lower stretch; here the river narrows between rocky outcrops and the beach above low water is relatively firm. It is no surprise that the main route between south-east Cornwall and the rest of the country came to cross here or that settlements grew up on the shore. It is no coincidence that Brunel later chose the spot to build his railway bridge.

The crossing is short but not without its dangers; boatmen rowed across sometimes choppy water and coped as best they could with the winds and tides that funnel through the narrow gap, sometimes coming ashore some way up or downstream of their intended target.

Records of 1270 show that a well-established ferry was by then in the hands of the Valletorts at nearby Trematon Castle, but there is evidence of Saxon nobility at Trematon in the tenth century and it is reasonable to suppose that, at least by then, traders and militias would have needed to cross here, commandeering a rag bag of local boats. Perhaps for hundreds of years before any formal ferry service was established, local boatmen would have charged folk to be taken across. 900 years ago? Most likely a lot more.

Being the best crossing point, and with good shelter and anchorage for sea-going vessels too, the waterside hamlet on the western shore grew. Huddled around the ferry and the fishermen's cottages, the tight-knit Waterside community retained a protective sense of identity, even as the town began to move up the steep hill behind and become the Saltash of today. The to-and-fro of the ferryboats became the beating heart of that community, with the sixteenth century Passage House Inn (latterly The Boatman and a

wine and tapas bar) established as a staging post for travellers and their horses, and as the watering hole for a quick pint whilst waiting to get across.

As demand grew, larger boats with more oarsmen carried more people and some could accommodate small carriages, manhandled aboard. In the eighteenth century, 'horseboats' were introduced; resembling modern ferries with a ramp at either end, they were still rowed by teams with heavy sweeps. The arrival of steam revolutionised the crossing, first by towing the horseboats with tugs. Then, from 1832, a succession of seven 'chain ferries', building on the original design by James Meadows Rendel, hauled themselves along chains lying on the riverbed. These drive-on-drive-off 'floating bridges' began to resemble those now familiar at Torpoint and elsewhere.

As populations grew, and transport improved, so traffic increased. As horse-drawn carts and carriages gave way to motor vehicles, queues grew longer. For centuries, the notorious gradients of Culver Road (and Normandy Hill on the St. Budeaux side) faced all travellers using the otherwise ideal crossing point. The Turnpike Act of 1833 established the shallower gradient routes of what are now Old Ferry Road (and Wolseley Road) so that heavier wagons could access the floating bridge. By the 1950s, the route had become the A38 trunk road and, with increasing influxes of tourists funnelling through, it became inevitable that the single floating bridge was unable to cope. There are memories of queues stretching more than a mile to Burraton Cross and St Budeaux square and if a chain broke there was major disruption. A road bridge that could carry many more vehicles in a much shorter time

was the solution. The Tamar Bridge opened in 1961 and the ferry bell had rung for the last time.

*On 23rd October 1961,*
*The pulse of the Waterside*
*Stopped*

The ferry made one last ceremonial crossing on 24th October and was then no more but, in the minds of the post-war generation who remember it, there was a lasting affection for its smells, sounds and, not least, the brass bell that rang one minute before each crossing. Nowhere was this felt more strongly than in the Passage House Inn, where Joan Truscott was the licensee and Gerald Truscott had been one of the last ferry engineers. With the shipping and fishing industries in decline and road and rail traffic now flying across the river high above, the Waterside felt isolated and seemed to lack purpose. In 1982, Gerald recognised the need for him and other old Watersiders (calling themselves The Tidewatchers' Club) to have a place to sit and natter, and he spearheaded the building of a community centre. Now proudly standing on Essa Rock at the foot of the Brunel bridge pillar and close by the site of the ferry ticket office, Ashtorre Rock opened in 1991; it is open daily for tea and cakes with a great view of the river and the slipways that still mark the route of the last ferries. Now under the leadership of his daughter, Lynn Marsh, Ashtorre Rock (formally Saltash Waterside Community Association) has been the driving force behind many of the celebrations and festivals that have kept the Waterside vibrant.

One such event was the Ferry50 Festival in 2011, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the final ferry service, with river crossings, exhibitions and fireworks. But the festival planners noted that

there was little permanent to keep the ferry memory alive. Only a small and easily overlooked stone plaque sits in a nearby wall and the idea grew for a more conspicuous memorial that could celebrate the ferry and bring it to the attention of future generations. Lynn became project leader and driver of the project, securing funding from Heritage Lottery Fund, Cornwall Council, Saltash Town Council, Waitrose and the Cooperative Membership Community Fund.

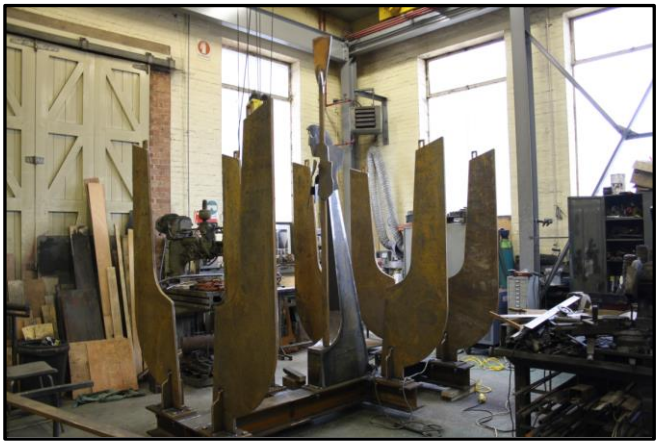
The original idea was for a sculpture at the head of the steam ferry slipway, on the site of the demolished stabling for the Passage House Inn. The town council were enthusiastic and agreed in principle to a structure on what was now council land.

Saltash artist, John Forster was invited to develop and submit a design. John had worked with Ashtorre Rock on previous projects, including the 2006 community mural marking the bicentenary of Brunel's birth, and a 2009 community art exhibition, Painting the Bridge, marking 150 years of the railway bridge.

Heritage Lottery Fund showed interest but – to fulfil their own criteria - on condition that the piece was informative and that there was community involvement in its design. The concept moved from being purely an abstract sculptural form to an 'info-sculpture' through which passers-by – both locals and visitors to the town – could come to know something of the history of the ground on which they stood and the river crossing that stretched before them.

This challenge led to the inclusion of brass panels that could tell the story of the ferry. And to be practical, these panels needed to be positioned in a way to be readable. The designer's solution

was an arrangement of eight vertical ‘fins’ that could support the brasses but might also suggest the ribs of a boat. These heavy ribs hint at the shadowy hulks of boats, large and small, that cross the river no more – no particular boat but the spirit of all the boats that had plied the crossing over the centuries.



The sculpture begins to take shape in the workshop

One of the fins appears fallen and becomes a ‘memory seat’ overlooking the slipway, where today’s travellers can imagine and remember. Beneath this are preserved a short length of a steam ferry side chain, discovered embedded in the shore, and stones reclaimed from the Passage House Inn during renovations.

And from the midst of the hulk rises the head of the windswept ferryman oriented to be looking across the river towards landfall on the opposite shore. The figure represents all who kept the ferry running and helped to keep the Waterside alive, men and women who pulled oar, tended boiler, shovelled coal, repaired chain, sold tickets, rang the bell and polished brasses - the ferrymen and women who have worked the ferry over the centuries to link communities on either bank and to give travellers passage to places further afield.

A maquette of the proposed design was displayed at the Saltash Regatta in 2012 and drew wide support from the public so, with Heritage Lottery Fund agreement now in the bag, Saltash Town Council gave the go-ahead. The public were invited to become Ferrylink Supporters. Nearly 200 made donations and also wrote down their thoughts, links and memories of the ferry. These are now sealed inside a time capsule within the sculpture's foundations.

*Eye to the opposite shore,*
*Feeling wind, sensing tide, weather foul weather fair,*
*Saltash Ferryman, muscle ready, needing a fare,*
*Eye to the opposite shore.*

John enlisted the expertise of Plymouth metal sculptor, Katy Lake, and South Brent artist blacksmith, Rob Hills to fabricate the work. Corten steel was the material of choice. Corten is a copper chromium steel alloy that quickly develops a rich rust-coloured protective layer that prevents further corrosion and decay, making it virtually maintenance free in many architectural and industrial applications. In sculpture, it is well-known through Antony Gormley's *Angel of the North* and Richard Serra's huge landscape interventions, and the rusty appearance would give a suitable feeling of age and weathering to the Saltash structure.

To hold the heavy, tall and precarious elements, everything is bolted to a subframe of beams sitting on a concrete pad, just below ground level. The whole structure is estimated to weigh around three tons.

Sixty-four brass panels were planned to engage the participation of the Saltash community in two ways. Some would aim to 'tell the story' of the ferry over time. Others would feature quotations from a Memory Bank. Public interest had shown that there were still many people in the town who remember their experiences of the ferry, some of them just children at the time. To capture these recollections, the Heritage Lottery Fund proposal therefore included an oral history project. Stephanie Norgaard, a sound artist with experience of reminiscence gathering and a keen

interest in South West folk history, set out to interview people who were willing to share their memories[1]. From this rich archive of

Overlooking the old slipway, brass panels tell the ferry story

contemporary records, 20 short quotations – including revealing and amusing anecdotes - were engraved onto the brass panels. Together they help us to reflect on the real-world of life down at the Waterside in the decades up to 1961, when things changed forever. Other brasses would tell the ferry story through the centuries. Ten artists who had some connection with Ashtorre Rock were invited to identify events and situations that could bring to life the world of the ferries over the years and, together, paint a picture for the passers-by. Bruce Hunt and Saltash Heritage were invaluable in pointing to key historical information and providing photographs that might trigger ideas. Some of the resulting images are factual, others more imaginary, including ferry designs, incidents, livestock en route for market – even the passage of the circus on its annual tour of Cornwall. The artists were Bethan

[1] Some 30 recordings and 50 transcriptions are available on the Saltashferrylink.weebly.com website.

Crane, Chrissie Russell, Gillian Sweeney, Jim Thompson, Jo Beer, Lyn Douglass, Neil Mawdsley, Shari Hills, Stephen Beer and Vivienne Screech. They applied their images directly to the brass panels, which were then acid-etched.

After inevitable delays, tight budgets and hefty doses of volunteer work and goodwill, including groundworks by Brian Statton and Southwest Surfacing Specialists, *The Saltash Ferryman* was eventually installed a couple of years on from Ferry50. On 1st June 2013, former Mayor, Martin Gee, who had been a keen supporter, officially 'launched' it with a pint of Ferryman Ale, supplied by Exeter Brewery.

Councillor Martin Gee 'launches' The Saltash Ferryman

Whilst the Corten has maintained its rich colouration as expected, the brass panels have been more problematic. Brass had been chosen to recall the brass work proudly maintained by the steam ferry crews and also because it was a suitable material on which the artists' images and the memory bank quotations could be

etched. They were expected to dull to an attractive patina, but they soon became susceptible to the salty waterside environment and tarnishing began to obscure the images and texts, making them difficult to read.

Several attempts have been made to clean them and apply recommended protective treatments, but they have been short-lived. In 2023, Ashtorre Rock began to raise donations for yet another attempt and approached a specialist company, Osprey Metal Finishers in Hertfordshire, who generously offered to sponsor and undertake the renovation. A small Ashtorre team led by Tony Marsh removed the panels, which Osprey then cleaned, finished and polished before applying a stove-baked lacquer. The local team refurbished the fixing points, refitting the brasses with

new security bolts in June 2024, and the ferry story is once again clear for all to see.

Some of the team return to inspect the refurbished brasses, 2024

More information about the Ferry50 Festival and *The Saltash Ferryman* can be found at www.Saltashferrylink.weebly.com, which includes historical notes and photographs, extracts from the oral memory bank, children's learning resources, an evocative sound collage and two songs reflecting on the ferry story.

Bruce Hunt's comprehensive book, *The Saltash Ferry*, is an excellent historical overview and available from Saltash Heritage - opening times Saturday 10am to 4pm and Wednesday 2pm to 4pm (www.saltash.org).

*The Saltash Ferryman* has now become an established part of Waterside. It has been formally adopted by Saltash Town Council and it is listed in the Art UK national register of public art, which

also includes other paintings and sculptures in and around the town and is worth investigating. See www.artuk.org (search: Saltash).

*The Saltash Ferryman* is easy to find - just south of the Brunel rail bridge in Saltash: Grid reference: SX433587; w3w: ///frock.drag.text There is free parking just north of the bridges at w3w ///brain.belts.vine.

Or if arriving by train at Saltash, walk down the Culver Road hill (at the western end of the station) and you'll pass Mary Newman's Cottage and catch Rosie Fierek's ceramic mural, *Saltash Fisherfolk*[2], on the Silver Street corner, the Brunel 200 mural on the Livewire building, and David Whittley's *Tamara* mural on the Union Inn on the way. It's an easy 0.2 mile stroll. But be aware that 'easy down' means a bit of a climb back to the station.

At high spring tide, the river can overtop the slipway and the hulk eerily appears to be floating once more

[2] See 'Saltash Fisherfolk' on the Saltash History and Heritage website: https://saltash.org/saltash-waterside/saltash-fisherfolk.html

# Memories of Exploring the Tamar 1976-2003
## *Susan Pittman*

From 1976 until 2003 my husband Ken and I took our summer holidays by the Tamar, only missing out for three years. For the early years we rented a cottage at Halton Quay, where Ken loved sailing and I, swimming. Later we rented National Trust cottages on the Cotehele estate.

The first boat we took down was a Mirror. This was liable to tip over in choppy water but was ideal for pulling up on to hard standing by the river. In the cottage that first year I found a copy of Frank Booker's *Industrial Archaeology of the Tamar Valley*[3] and I was immediately hooked.

Ken enjoyed working out the tidal challenges of the Tamar, while I enjoyed exploration and landscape history. Together we embarked on a series of expeditions covering the sites described by Booker. I think I can now claim to have covered virtually all of them. Where and how far we went depended on the tides and weather. One year the tides might favour more upstream travel, while on another there would be more downstream trips. We would leave on one tide and return with the next. In 1982 Ken bought a Tideway 'Snowgoose', which was wooden hulled and clinker-built. This was more stable than the Mirror, but heavier and needed to be moored offshore. In 1983 came Wild Fire 'Suki', with a dropped keel filled with lead weights - fast and very stable - but of limited use for exploration. During poor weather, or weather unsuitable for sailing, we walked and visited sites by car.

[3] Frank Booker (1971) *Industrial Archaeology of the Tamar Valley* David and Charles, Newton Abbot.

Ken wanted to sail using the elements of wind, tide and current alone, and although he always took an outboard motor, he considered its use a failure. In any case, neither of us liked the noise of the engine, which shattered the peace of the river. So it was that over the years we became familiar with the tidal Tamar from Weir Head to Plymouth. As regards destinations, we managed to reach Morwellham almost every year, but as far as Weir Head, the end of the tidal Tamar, only once, in 1984. The view of the water tumbling over the weir distracted us, and we crashed into the remains of an earlier structure across the river, but luckily 'Snowgoose' survived unscathed. We moored alongside the 'manure' island. This was the only time that we were challenged by a landowner, but with the boat lying between high and low water we had not broken any rules of trespass. We had a picnic, and I celebrated our long-distance achievement by having a swim - the water being much colder here than at Halton Quay.

Downstream trips to Cargreen and to Weir Quay did not present much of a challenge, except for the unpredictable winds on the Pentillie reach caused by the land shelter of the hills on both sides of long bend in the river. Saltash and Torpoint could be reached occasionally, but the furthest destination was Drake's Island, on which we landed successfully in 1980 and 1983. However, we had to use the outboard motor after Saltash because of the unavoidable counter tides. I believe the island was being used as an adventure training facility in these years, but we were able to explore the fortifications thoroughly. There was a time when the island was closed to the public, but I note now that there are organised tours via ferry for £18 per adult.

Cornwall in the 1970s to 1990s was a mecca for holidaymakers and tourists, although commercialisation had not developed to the extent of today. The advent of the M25 and M5, stretches of dual carriageway along the A303, the A38 Expressway, the extension of the A30, all gave better access into Cornwall, but it could be argued - at a price. Places in the 1970s seemed less crowded and therefore visitor control was more relaxed. At Cotehele, for example, one could look closely at the fabulous chapel clock dating from 1485-1489. It is the oldest unaltered clock in regular use and has no clock face. Instead, the mechanism connects with the bell above to ring the hour.

Morwellham was a mysterious place with scarcely a visitor to disturb the ambience. We visited every year to see industrial features emerge from the undergrowth or from below ground. In 1979 I bought the first *Tamar Journal* (1978), and in 1985 wrote an article for Number 7 ('Tentative Comments on Hedge Banks around Halton Quay'), and several other articles have followed since. Rather perversely, the more Morwellham was developed, reconstructed and re-enacted the more the magic waned for me. I recognised that financial resources were needed to enable projects to be carried out, and that income depended on visitor numbers, but it came as a shock when entrance fees were introduced. Before long the place swarmed with visitors and car parking overwhelmed the site. I feel fortunate that Ken and I were able to appreciate the area before full-scale commercialism took over.

In those early years the notion that we were trespassing did not really bother us. The sites were abandoned, and we had them to ourselves. Derelict industrial buildings added to the romance of the landscape. We loved coming across buildings emerging

through woodland and covered in ivy. The count-house at South Hooe comes to mind in this category, and the statue of Sir James Tillie (1645-1713) in a hilltop mausoleum overlooking the Tamar. Another site now strictly out-of-bounds was the arsenic chimney at Gawton. We explored this in 1977 and walked downhill inside the open walls of the arsenic flue, constructed in the 1890s and claimed to be longest of its kind in the country. The flue was lined with arsenic crystals, which we took care not to touch, but on reflection how foolhardy we were!

In the 1970s and early 1980s unused barns as well as former industrial buildings came onto the market and were purchased by those wishing to relocate to Cornwall, to have second homes or to create holiday homes. We could have purchased a property by the Tamar, but were both working and did not want the responsibility of looking after two properties. We were also against second homes in principle. Many structures have been re-purposed and even saved from dereliction, which in one way is admirable, but in another the conversions and modernisations have not always been sympathetic. More to the point for this article, wandering around is now severely restricted. At Halton Quay cottages rented out by the Pentillie estate to local workers have now been sold, upgraded and enjoyed by new owners. Local people, however, have lost out.

In the neighbouring cottage at Halton Quay lived Maud Dawe in conditions which would be considered 'unsuitable for human habitation'. She had no electricity, but cooked and heated her cottage with an antique, but effective, range. Fuel cost her nothing because she would fetch driftwood from the reed bed opposite her house. Lighting was by paraffin lamp hanging from the ceiling. Her water supply came from an outside cold water tap, and a

bucket sufficed for her toilet, the contents of which she threw round the garden every morning. Tradesman came round weekly, so she was able to buy greengroceries, groceries, dairy products, and meat on her doorstep. We also took advantage of this service, which stopped in the early 1980s, when we arrived one year to find that Maud had been relocated into a care home in Liskeard. We visited her there and she was revelling in the wonders of hot water taps and switching lights on and off. A year later the novelty had worn off, she had nothing to do, and she quickly went into decline. The cottage was sold and soon linked with modern utilities to become a most desirable residence.

Sometimes special events based on the river coincided with our holidays. The farmer up the road from the riverfront headed a mine rescue team, and the heavy equipment was parked on the verge opposite the farm. This was when many of the mine shafts were uncapped, hidden by undergrowth or not fenced off, though we were relieved to learn that more animals required rescue than people. To raise money for the team an annual raft race from Halton Quay to Calstock was organised. Twenty or so rafts of varying degrees of seaworthiness entered, many hardly making it to the centre of the river! One year people from the Manpower Services Commission scheme had cleared the top of the lime kilns and we were able to get a birds' eye view of the efforts to stay afloat and then to steer the unwieldy rafts.

Two unexpected but memorable occasions involved the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich. One day we planned a visit to Butspill mine on the Bere peninsula. We sailed to Cotehele and moored by the slipway on the Devon bank, opposite ready to walk to the site. To our surprise *Shamrock* had been moved from its

dock and was moored alongside Cotehele quay with a crowd gathered nearby. *Shamrock* had been built in 1899 and was one the last remaining sailing barges on the Tamar. It turned out to be the boat's opening day following six years of restoration. No-one else was on the Devon side looking over to the whole scene so we took photographs to send to the National Maritime Museum and were delighted later in the year to be invited to a reception there.

The second time we were invited to a reception at the Museum followed a chance meeting at Halton Quay. One morning we glanced out of the window to see a strange-shaped canoe being launched. Ever curious we went to watch. The vessel turned out to be a replica Viking lake canoe, built by Professor Basil Greenhill, director of the National Maritime Museum from 1967 to 1983, having its first trial. He had no camera with him, so we offered to take photographs as a record. The trials seemed to be a success in that the canoe remained buoyant, and his theories of its construction based on archaeological remains were borne out.

Detailed knowledge of tides and currents is as essential for swimming in the Tamar as it is for sailing. For reasons that would take too long to explain here, the Tamar displays the phenomenon of the surface water rising when the tide is ebbing[4]. It took some years to be able to 'read' the river, but if the salmon fishermen were around, there was always help at hand should it be needed. I learnt to swim a couple of hours before high tide, because once the tide turned it ebbed strongly quite soon. Another precaution was to swim against the tide, so the current aided the return swim. I found with favourable tides I could swim from Halton Quay half a

[4] See *Tamar* Vol.2, 1979-80 Kenneth J. George 'Tides in the Tamar', pp.6-20.

mile or more downstream to the Hornifast inlet on the Pentillie estate, and half a mile or so upstream to Chapel Farm. In the 1970s I was a stronger swimmer and took more risks - swimming out to the buoys in Devon and even to the mud banks on the Devon side, but high tide brings the tourist trip boats from Plymouth and speed boats far exceeding the speed limit, so I learnt not to be foolhardy. I had fun mud larking at low tide and found an eighteenth-century bottle discarded from the quay as well as numerous broken pieces of Victorian pottery. In an exceptional neap tide I could wade across the river to the Devon bank. Surprisingly, the bottom was sandy, but furrowed parallel with the flow, making uncomfortable walking, ankle deep one step and thigh deep the next! There used to be a ferry from Chapel Farm to North Hooe Farm, and I could see the remains of a firm surface on both sides, so tried to walk across there, but had to turn back because the water became too deep to wade through, but too shallow to swim.

Swimming brought me into close contact with the salmon fishermen, and when I learned that their licences were being withdrawn to conserve salmon stocks, I decided to find out more about the history of salmon netting in the Tamar, and about the skills required to succeed. This led to many interesting contacts with local families; I wrote up what I learnt in *Tamar* Vols. 21 and 22. A lucrative spin-off was contact from the prestigious journal *Maritime Life and Times*, asking me to adapt the articles for its readers - as well as being paid per word. A full page A4 photograph earned £100! The article was published in No.19, of 2003, but the journal went out of production with no. 34 in 2007.

The weather in August 1979 was atrocious, and we heard on the radio of the tragic deaths of nineteen sailors taking part in the Fastnet Race from the Isle of Wight to the Fastnet rock off the south coast of Ireland. The weather kept us indoors for a couple of days, but after that, with Ken unwell, I ventured out alone - my quest to find Kerrybullock Park. This led to contact with fellow local historians and the making of a whole set of friends in the area. In Kent I had carried out research into the late medieval deer park at Lullingstone, which has one of the finest collections of veteran pollarded trees in the south-east, including one oak found to be one thousand years old. At Cotehele I had spotted Norden's map of Cornwall c.1610 with Kerrybullock Park depicted nearby, but no-one seemed to know where it might have been. Finally, after some abortive searches, the obvious clue 'Deer Park Farm' led me to Luckett, where the park lay on the north slopes of Kit Hill. To my delight the entire four to five mile circuit of the park, enclosing about 460 acres, remained imprinted in the landscape with original walls and banks standing in several stretches along lanes and tracks. A booklet based on my research of the park, which was owned by the Duchy of Cornwall from 1337, was published in 1990 by Stoke Climsland Parish Archive.

In 1993 I took early retirement and decided to study for an M.A. in Medieval and Tudor studies. A topic for my dissertation had to be found and knowing that the Calstock Parish Archive had been assembled in 1985 as the result of a Job Creation scheme (MSC), I decided to use that as a basis of my research, picking the Calstock Church seating plan of 1588 to discover what I could about Elizabethan society at that time. After my husband's death in 2003 I decided to study for a PhD, reverting to my deer park research, and I am pleased to report that I achieved my doctorate in 2011.

Without Ken, holidays by the Tamar have not been the same. I come to Cornwall on my own, but the contacts and friends I made in the early years, and my interest in the Tamar Valley and its history have given me focus. I always find new projects to interest me, and the landscape enchants me as ever. I continue to swim in the Tamar, being careful only to use breaststroke so that I do not swallow the water. I take advice from the University of Plymouth School of Biological and Marine Sciences over the quality of the water, and recent reports have not been encouraging, with effluent and arsenic content being of concern. I am not sure whether I will swim when I next come, but I would sorely miss it.

We first rented the cottage at Halton Quay because we were looking for a riverside spot which might be suitable for sailing and swimming. From that first year our expectations were more than met and we were repeatedly drawn back to the Tamar Valley. We had tried various locations before, but none had that magnetic power. Although we visited all the top tourist attractions once, we preferred to stay locally within the valley and enjoy all the delights it had to offer.

Halton Quay

# The Black Presence in the Tamar Valley – some early fragmentary references, 1500-1900

*Anthony Tibbles*

Over the last 50 years it has become clear that people of African descent have visited and lived in the British Isles for two millennia. The overall numbers are small but the evidence almost certainly under-estimates them, as it was only when Black people came into contact with the authorities, and when their ethnicity was specifically referred to, that we can clearly identify them. The main concentration historically has always been in London and the main cities, particularly the major ports like Liverpool and Bristol, but there are references, often fragmentary, in every county across the country. This article provides some very limited evidence from the Tamar Valley.

The first Africans known to have visited the area came to Plymouth in 1567 when John Hawkins temporarily brought about 50 Africans to the city following one of his slaving voyages, but after a few weeks he shipped them out to be sold in the Americas. On his final voyage, which arrived back in 1569, Hawkins brought seven Africans with him. Their fate is not known but they may well have remained in Britain, perhaps even locally.

One African who we know did spend time in the city was Diego, who assisted Francis Drake in his attacks on the Spanish in Panama. He acted as Drake's personal servant during his circumnavigation of the world, until he was killed in 1579. He probably spent four years in Drake's household between 1573 and 1577, perhaps much of the time in Plymouth.

Other early documentary evidence comes from parish records, which show that there were a number of Black people living and working in Plymouth in Elizabethan and Early Stuart times. Researchers have examined the registers of St Andrew's Church during this period and found records of seven baptisms and seven burials of Black people or people of mixed-race heritage. The baptisms relate to seven children where one of the parents is identifiable as Black. Five of them were born to women out of wedlock, although most of the fathers seem to have been known, at least by repute. Several of the women were identified as servants. It is not clear in the case of the two remaining children which of the parents was Black.

These were almost certainly people who were resident in the town for some time, perhaps years in some instances. Three of the Black parents and four of those who were buried would seem to have been servants of local merchants, but the status of the others is not clear. It is unlikely that their presence in the town is the result of slaving by local merchants, which had ceased in the mid-1570s. They most probably found their way here indirectly as a result of the trading links with Spain and Portugal or perhaps North Africa.

The baptismal entries read:

'Helene, d[aughter] of Cristian the negro s[er]vant to Richard Sheere, the supposed father being Cuthbert Holman' baptised 2 May 1593

'Cristian, d[aughter] of Mary, a negro of John White's and the supposed d[aughter] of John Kinge, a Dutchman' baptised 17 November 1594

‘Fortunatus, s[on] of a negro of Thomas Kegevin’s the supposed father being a Portugall’ baptised 24 December 1594

‘Susan, d[aughter] of a Blackmore’ baptised 4 October 1596

‘Ric[hard] son of Marye a Neger, base, ye reputed father Rog[er] Haggett’ baptised 23 June 1603

‘Katherin, d[aughter] of a Blackamore’ baptised 17 January 1630

‘Elizabeth, d[aughter] of Angell,a Blackmore, the reputed father, a fleming’ baptised 11 January 1633

There are also seven burials of Black people during the same period. No ages are given of any of them though all the males were probably adults and only Cristian White, the one female, is likely to have been a child.

‘Bastien, a Blackamore of Mr William Hawkins’ buried 10 December 1583

‘Anthony John, a Neyger’ buried 18 March 1587

‘Carbew Lazia, a negro’ buried 11 March 1591

‘White, Cristian d[aughter] of John, Negro’ buried 10 March 1594

‘a Blackmore at Capt. Sparkes’ buried 30 November 1601

‘a Blackmore at Mr Stallenge’ buried 6 December 1601

‘a neiger who was employed by Mr Ambrose Jennings’ buried 8 August 1640

Sir James Bagg, who was a leading figure in early Stuart Plymouth and has a reputation for corruption and wrong doing, also had a

Black servant during the same period. In 1628 Bagg ordered that he should be 'handsomely clothed', no doubt in some fine livery commensurate with his master's standing in local and national society.

All these references are extremely tantalising as they provide so little information and leave so many questions unanswered. They are indicative, however, that there was a small Black community in Plymouth at this period.

Undoubtedly further work on the registers of other churches in the city and over a wider period would reveal more such entries. Other records may also provide information. During the Napoleonic wars, army recruitment records document two Black men who enlisted in Plymouth and may have been resident there. Joseph Degenne was a 27-year-old labourer, who had been born in Guadeloupe, and Francis Augustine was a 24-year-old cook from Saint Domingo. Augustine went on to serve for 24 years, retiring in 1829.

It is also likely that as a major base for the army and Royal Navy, there were temporary Black residents or visitors amongst the military personnel, as both organisations are known to have had Black members, particularly in the late eighteenth century. A hint of this is given in a newspaper report of a riot in Plymouth in August 1780 which took place between men of various militia groups. It had started as an argument involving two Black bandsmen in the Somerset Militia but no details of the cause are given.

Whilst it is perhaps not surprising that there were people of African heritage in a major port like Plymouth, it is more

unexpected to find any Black people living further up the Tamar valley. Although there are only two brief references throughout the whole of the eighteenth century, they again emphasise the point that Black people could be found in the most unpredictable of places. Both men are referred to as servants of people of standing who had strong links with the capital. Whilst it is impossible to know how they were viewed by contemporaries, they were probably regarded as property in a similar way to enslaved Africans on the plantations in the Caribbean.

The first reference comes from a memorial stone now set against the north wall of the parish church of St Martin and St Giles at Werrington, just north of Launceston.

It reads

> Deposited Here
> Are the Remains of Philip Scipio
> Servant to the Duke of Wharton
> Afterwards to Sir William Morice
> An African
> Whose Quality might have done Honour
> To any Nation or Climate
> And Give Us to See
> That Virtue is Confined
> To no Country or Complexion
> Here Weep
> Uncorrupted Fidelity
> And Plain Honesty
> In pious regard to which virtue's approv'd
> By a brother and husband...
> (The remaining line or two are illegible)

According to the parish register, Philip Scipio, ‘a black servant to Sir William Morice’, was buried on 10 September 1734 at Werrington.

As is almost always the case in such circumstances, we know more about those who ‘owned’ him than we do about Philip Scipio himself. It is said that Philip was brought from St Helena by the first Duke of Wharton (1698-1731) but although there was a large population of enslaved Africans on the island at that time, it has not been possible to substantiate that claim. Wharton was typical of a certain eighteenth-century aristocrat – a spendthrift and drunkard, who amassed huge debts. Despite being raised to a dukedom by George I at the age of only 18, he moved abroad in 1725 and became a notorious supporter of the Jacobite cause and died in penury of alcoholism in Spain at the age of only 33 in 1730.

The following year, the Duke’s sister, Lady Lucy, married Sir William Morice (about 1707-1750) and tradition maintains that Philip Scipio was also her servant. Perhaps the Duke had transferred him to Lucy when he moved abroad, and she took him with her when she married. Clearly Philip was highly esteemed and his passing was lamented. It is sad that we know so little about him and his time at Werrington.

A further reference comes from the parish registers for St Andrew’s Church, Calstock. On 19 March 1748 the baptism took place of Thomas, the ‘base’ (i.e. illegitimate) child of Mary Crocker, ‘by Mrs Eliz[abeth] Foote’s Black called Caesar’. Elizabeth Foote was a widow, her husband John having died in September 1743. He was a merchant with business interests in London and had bought the estate of Harewood on the outskirts of

Calstock in 1733. Although he had been declared bankrupt in 1739, it does not seem to have affected his property in Cornwall and his son and grandson lived there for the next sixty years or so. Unfortunately, nothing is known about Mary Crocker, and no further trace has been found of Caesar or his son, Thomas. It seems likely that Foote had 'acquired' Caesar through his connections in London though this must remain speculation.

*Charles Langsford of Morden Mill and family, with their domestic servant – possibly Amelia Lock (c.1894)*

One further intriguing mystery worth noting is a photograph (above), dating from about 1894, of Charles Langsford and his family, of Morden Mill, which includes a Black woman. Still known in the family as ‘Black Cook’, it has been suggested that she is Amelia Lock, who is listed as a 26 year-old domestic servant in the 1891 census. However, there is no confirmation of any Black heritage in Amelia’s ancestry on either her mother’s or her father’s side.

Although all these references are extremely brief and pose more questions than they answer, they do show that Black people have lived and worked in the valley for several centuries.

**Further Reading**

Peter Fryer *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, 1984

Miranda Kaufmann *Black Tudors: The Untold Story*, 2017

Lucy MacKeith *Local Black History: A beginning in Devon*, 2007

Imtiaz Habib *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677*, 2008

I am grateful to Sally Eccles and Mary Martin for their help with ‘Black Cook’.

# The Prince of Wales Mine, Harrowbarrow: the final phases

*Keith Loze and Steve Roberts*[5]

## Some historical background

What we now call the Prince of Wales Mine is situated in a rich mineral zone, and has a long and chequered history, having been worked since at least the medieval period. In the 19th century, the site was occupied by several mines, including Wheal Fortune, Wheal Pleasant, Wheal George, Wheal Barnard and West Edward. The group was known collectively as "Calstock United Tin and Copper Mines" in the early 19th century. Then in 1861 the mine was re-constituted and named after the eldest son of Victoria and Albert as the "Prince of Wales Mine".

The mine developed some seven east – northeast trending mineralised faults and a north-south cross-course. Production of copper was good at first, with dividends of £6,699 between 1876-9. The mine employed 120 people, but the copper deposit was to fade out. However, tin was discovered in Watson's Shaft. A new company was formed in 1878, which continued to sink Watson's Shaft. A 50-inch pumping engine manufactured by Harveys of Hayle was erected in 1880.In 1888 a second-hand stamps engine and boiler were purchased and erected on site, the number of stamping heads eventually reaching 56. A third engine house was

[5] Keith and Steve initially published this research in the Plymouth Mining and Mineral Club Journal, Vol.53, No.3, February 2024 and Vol.54, No.1, June 2024. They have kindly agreed to amalgamation of their material for publication in 'Tamar'. Some minor editorial changes have been made in combining their original articles.

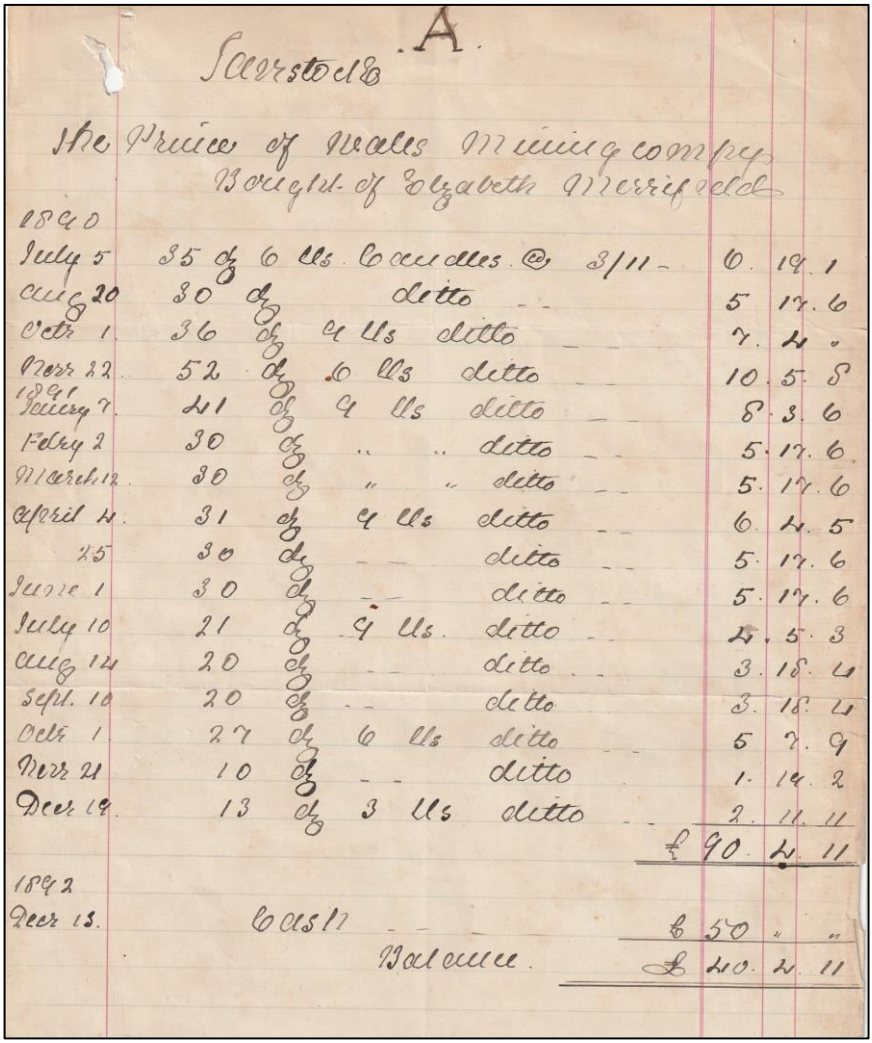
also constructed in the same year to house a rotative engine for winding from Watson's Shaft.

By 1890 the workforce totalled 148 and Watson's Shaft reached a depth of 166 fathoms (996 feet) but production was not good enough to be profitable, resulting in the mine being sold once again. Problems had been experienced underground, caused by a geological fault and the main lode had been lost in the 180-fathom level. Difficult times were ahead. Attempts to relocate the lode were in vain and to make things worse, tin prices were low.

A personal collection of archive paperwork includes items that really do illustrate the hard time the mine was experiencing in the late 19th century. There are two outstanding bills presented to the 'Court of the Vice Warden of the Stannaries' on November 16th, 1895. Both bills are dated 1892. One is from Elizabeth Merrifield for the supply of candles in the period of 1890-1892, which appears to have gone unpaid. The other is for items supplied by George Budge of the Lumburn Foundry[6], listing items including brass for stamps, stamp heads, guides and tappets – presumably all supplied for the second-hand stamps previously purchased. However, because of poor production and low tin prices the machinery was advertised for sale in 1894.

A third piece, also used in the Court, is a list of shareholders for the Prince of Wales mine. What is of interest is that Henry Budge of the foundry held five shares, but out of the seventy-two shareholders

[6] Situated on the road between Tavistock and Gunnislake.



A.

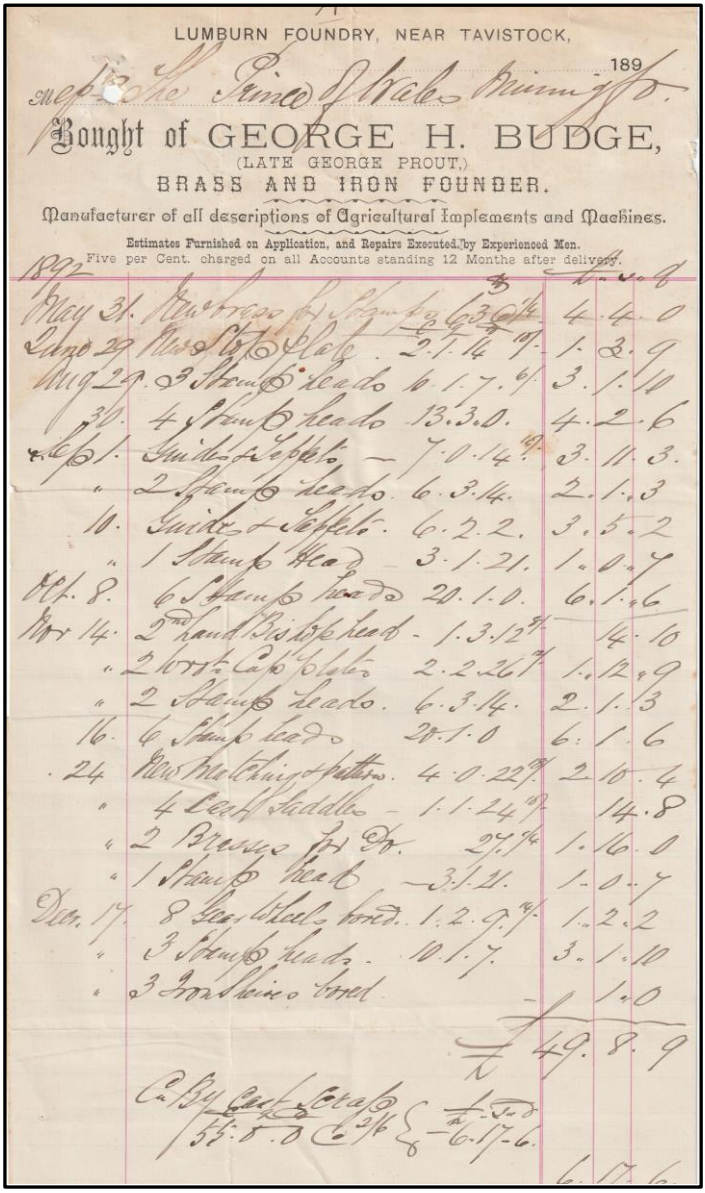
Scarsto 18

The Prince of Wales Mining Company

Bought of Elizabeth Merrifield

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1890 | | | |
| July 5 | 35 dz 6 lbs Candles @ 3/11 | 6. | 19. 1 |
| Aug 20 | 30 dz ditto | 5 | 17. 6 |
| Octr 1 | 36 dz 4 lbs ditto | 7. | 4. - |
| Novr 22 | 52 dz 6 lbs ditto | 10. | 5. 8 |
| 1891 | | | |
| Jany 7 | 41 dz 4 lbs ditto | 8. | 3. 6 |
| Febry 2 | 30 dz " " ditto | 5. | 17. 6 |
| March 12 | 30 dz " " ditto | 5. | 17. 6 |
| April 4 | 31 dz 4 lbs ditto | 6. | 4. 5 |
| 25 | 30 dz ditto | 5. | 17. 6 |
| June 1 | 30 dz ditto | 5. | 17. 6 |
| July 10 | 21 dz 4 lbs ditto | 4. | 5. 3 |
| Aug 12 | 20 dz ditto | 3. | 18. 4 |
| Sept. 10 | 20 dz ditto | 3. | 18. 4 |
| Octr 1 | 27 dz 6 lbs ditto | 5 | 7. 9 |
| Novr 21 | 10 dz ditto | 1. | 14. 2 |
| Decr 19 | 13 dz 3 lbs ditto | 2. | 11. 11 |
| | | £ 90. | 2. 11 |
| 1892 | | | |
| Decr 13. | Cash | £ 50. | " " |
| | Balance | £ 40. | 2. 11 |

Fig.1 Invoice for supply of candles to Prince of Wales Mine from Elizabeth Merrifield, presented to the Court of the Vice Warden of the Stannaries on November 16th, 1895.


LUMBURN FOUNDRY, NEAR TAVISTOCK.

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Bought of GEORGE H. BUDGE,

(LATE GEORGE PROUT,)

BRASS AND IRON FOUNDER.

Manufacturer of all descriptions of Agricultural Implements and Machines.

Estimates Furnished on Application, and Repairs Executed by Experienced Men.

Five per Cent. charged on all Accounts standing 12 Months after delivery.

Fig.2 Invoice from George Budge presented to Court of the Vice Warden of the Stannaries on November 16th, 1895.

only twelve actually lived in the Tamar Valley or Tavistock. Perhaps this indicated uncertainty amongst the locals on the success of the mine. This list of shareholders was dated the same year as the machinery was put up for sale. I am unfortunately unaware of the outcome of the court.

Total stoppage was to come in 1897, but the mine was sold in 1900 to a new French company, named 'Calstock Tin and Copper Limited'. Their share issue dated 1903 is of great interest as half of the certificate is in French. This issue was aimed at raising £60,000 in £1 shares. Their company number '65854' was registered in 1900 and was dissolved sixteen years later in February 1916.

**20th Century operations at Prince of Wales Mine**

Further interest in the mine was shown in 1928, but mining did not proceed. However, it was active again between 1939-49 as part of the war effort. Both tin and especially tungsten were in great demand, mining and processing being controlled by the Non-Ferrous Development Board. A new mill was established in 1940 to treat both tin and wolfram. The work on the mill was supervised at cost by Terrell, Davis and Toll. Mineral ores were brought in to be treated from other local mines including Ding Dong, Treburland and Devon Great Consols. The processed ore was taken to Gunnislake station and sent by rail to Plympton where it was collected and conveyed to Hemerdon Mine for further processing.

Prince of Wales was to play an important part in the wartime development of Hemerdon. Sampling at Hemerdon involved pitting to depths of 30 and 60 feet. However, it was not practical

to complete concentration of the ore at Hemerdon due to the absence of suitable plant and also probable water shortages in late summer and autumn. It was proposed to crush the ore at Hemerdon and send material by lorry – a distance of some 18 miles - to Tavistock where the load was weighed before proceeding to Prince of Wales Mine, where the empty lorry was re-weighed on the return journey. The concentrate produced was then sent to F. Hutchin of Camborne for the final assay. All labour involved at both Hemerdon and Prince of Wales Mine was provided by the Royal School of Mines.

The fine whiteish dump material at Prince of Wales originated from the processing of Hemerdon ore during this period. This processing at the site stopped in 1949. No further interest was shown in re-opening the mine until the 1970s, when renewed interest in the Prince of Wales site stimulated an extensive diamond drilling programme, resulting in the production of several thousand feet of drill cores.

A company named Prado Explorations, which had opened Mount Wellington Mine in Cornwall in the late 1960s, worked the Prince of Wales Mine sett from 1970 to 1974, under 'International Mine Services'. The operation was financed from Canada but supported by a British Government grant under the Mineral Reconnaissance Programme. During this period about 30 people were employed. The mine bore the company name of Golden Ram Resources (UK) Limited.

here must have been some promising results, as an exploratory level was driven through the killas[7] towards the granite of Hingston Down, but it must be assumed that the results were not good enough to progress any further. Later, in the 1980s, Brampton Resources showed interest in the mine, but once again they did not proceed[8].

The mine site is now designated as a scheduled monument and in 2007 it was acquired from the Duchy of Cornwall, when the engine houses went under considerable consolidation and conservation to preserve them for future generations.

This period of activity in the 1970s gave employment for some locals. Three of these were Terrence (Pop) Courtis, Alex Friendship and Wayne Halsey. Both Pop and Alex were later to get jobs at Morwellham Quay heritage site, where they were employed in the opening of the George and Charlotte Mine as a visitor attraction. Pop was to work there for fifteen years, bringing his mining skills which were developed at Luckett Mine, where he had started work at the age of fifteen. To quote Bob Le Marchant, formerly Mining Engineer at Morwellham Quay: "Pop was

[7] 'Killas' refers to metamorphic rock found adjacent to the granite masses of Devon and Cornwall. As the granite was intruded underground around 280 million years ago, the surrounding rocks were baked and altered.

[8] In his '*Industrial Archaeology of the Tamar Valley*', Frank Booker wrote of the Prince of Wales Mine: "if the main lode could be discovered it would make the mine an attractive proposition; as yet it still needs to be found". H.W. Dines in '*The Metalliferous Mining Region of South West England*, Vol. II, HMSO, 1956, p.642 confirmed "The Main Lode was not found and it now seems to be a general opinion that the slide heaves it southward, in which direction no prospecting has been done",

extremely well known and was one of the last original mining people in this part of Cornwall."

Fig.3 Pop Courtis and Alex Friendship moving rails into the new working at Prince of Wales Mine, early 1970s (author's photo)

Fig.4 Prince of Wales Mine 1974 following the failed attempt at re-opening. Hudson ore trucks and cement mixer (author's photo)

Fig.5 Prince of Wales Mine 1974 following failed attempt at re-opening. Abandoned truck and mine entrance closed off mixer (author's photo)

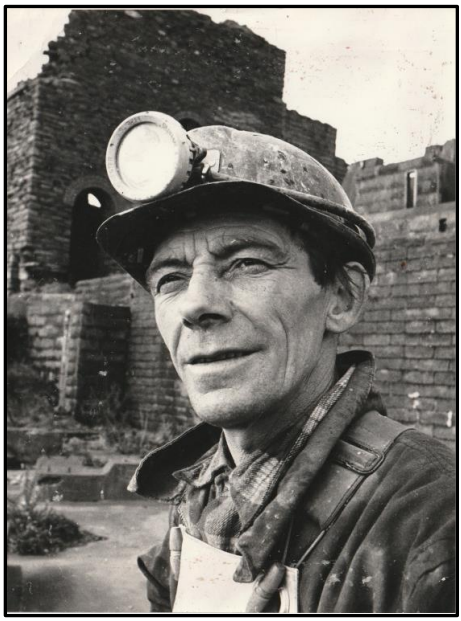
Although the George and Charlotte mine at Morwellham yielded many specimens of the mineral childrenite[9] whilst being prepared for visitors, the Prince of Wales mine also produced specimens. The site is now fenced, preventing mineral collection. There is, however, a circular route to follow and detailed interpretation boards.[10]

[9] See Mindat 'Childrenite' for details on this mineral www.mindat.org/min-1003.html

[10] See Tamar Valley National Landscape: 'Prince of Wales Mine and Wheal Brothers circular walk – can be downloaded from www.tamarvalley-nl.org.uk/walk/prince-of-wales-mine-wheal-brothers/

**In Search of 'Pop' Courtis** *(Steve Roberts)*

Further to Keith Loze's reference above to 'Pop' Courtis and his involvement at the Prince of Wales mine, I subsequently happened by chance to find a short clip of Pop speaking in a documentary film from the BBC2 series 'Nation on Film' from 2003, entitled 'Drill and Blast'. It dealt with the fortunes of the Cornish mining industry from the time of the Levant man engine disaster up to the closure of South Crofty in 1998.



Figs 6 and 7 'Pop' Courtis at Prince of Wales Mine during attempted re-opening early 1970s

Part of the story involved the push for strategic metals during and in the aftermath of World War 2 that saw both the re-opening of some closed Cornish mines and the search for previously unworked resources. The project at Luckett received a particular

mention - and one interviewee who spoke to camera was Pop Courtis. The interview appeared to have been recorded on film rather than video tape and so might well have taken place in the 1980s or early 1990s. The documentary voice-over is as follows:

"The wartime boom in the industry and the continued high price of tin after the war brought what looked like a renaissance for Cornish tin mining. Full-time entrepreneurs found it profitable to open long-abandoned workings like the old Luckett mine and they paid top wages, encouraging farm workers like 'Pop' Courtis to try their luck underground.

*Pop Courtis*: "I used to work over the Trewardle farm[11] here and I said to the boss 'I'm going to go and look at mining work, I can get a lot more money over there.' Then I was only getting about 25s a week something like that [at the farm]. Well, out there [Luckett] I was working two shifts for about £18 a week. It was hard graft, a lot harder graft, but you earned the money. I used to climb the chutes if anybody had a chute hung up. I used to take a

stick of Dynamite and fuse and cap and pack 'em in between the stones, light the fuse and get out as fast as I could go! Then they always nicknamed me 'Pop' – 'e'll go up an' give 'n a pop' – and that's how I got me nickname."

The interview was conducted with Pop standing against a blue tractor, so presumably once his mining days were over, he later

[11] What Pop says here is a little unclear, but on inspecting the map of the Luckett area, Trewardle would seem a likely interpretation, being about three miles from Luckett.

returned to farming. Wondering whether I might find out anything further online, I Googled Pop Courtis. An obituary notice in the Western Morning News reads: “COURTIS Terrence John (Pop) Peacefully after a long illness[2] on September 17th 2006 at Launceston Hospital, aged 77 years. Funeral service at St. Andrew's Church, Calstock, on Monday, September 25th at 2:30pm followed by interment at Albaston Cemetery.” Albaston Cemetery has an online presence, but though a search revealed two graves bearing the name ‘Courtis’, neither was that of Pop.

I emailed the Clerk to Calstock Parish Council, Clare Bullimore, who replied very quickly, as follows: “I can confirm a Terrence John Courtis was buried in Albaston on 25.09.2006 in plot number HG20.” I visited Albaston cemetery in early May and, armed with the plot number and also a plan, again courtesy of Clare, I found Pop’s grave with no problem.

Another internet item produced by my Google search was written by local Journalist and writer Stuart Fraser. In a diary format, he titles his entry for 21st April 2014 ‘Down Among the Dead Men’. The item (edited for brevity) reads:

**Concluding remarks**

Although this account does not attempt a full history of the Prince of Wales Mine, it confirms how complex the history of mining in the Tamar Valley and beyond can be. As with many such operations, there were considerable fluctuations in its fortunes, with period of prosperity and productivity as well as downturns, disappointment and periodic closure, followed by renewed optimism and confidence. The lure of ‘hitting the jackpot’ was strong. Among the Tamar mines, Prince of Wales was markedly

enduring, so that its story features some of the last ‘real Tamar miners’, including ‘Pop’ Courtis. Perhaps it is not impossible that the local mining industry is finally dead. As Frank Booker commented with respect to Prince of Wales in his ‘Industrial Archaeology of the Tamar Valley’: “if the main lode could be discovered it would make the mine an attractive proposition; as yet it still needs to be found!”

Fig. 8 Pop Courtis as he appeared in the BBC2 film, 2003

# The remarkable Lady Ernestine Edgcumbe: some glimpses of Tamarside life from her journal

*Clive Charlton*

Over the centuries, the Edgcumbe family produced many colourful, distinctive personalities. Among the most memorable was Lady Ernestine Edgcumbe, who lived through most of Queen Victoria's reign and well beyond (1843-1925). She was the daughter of Ernest, the 3rd Earl of Mount Edgcumbe and his wife Caroline (nee Feilding). She never married and remained very close to her family and their Tamar-side bases at Mount Edgcumbe and Cotehele, yet was also adventurous and outward-looking, very intelligent, and critically observant of the wider world. Ernestine benefited from the socio-economic privileges of her place in aristocratic society, which afforded her free time, access to transport, a network of well-heeled social contacts - and often, servants in support. But at least she made the most of her advantages; she was an enthusiastic, curious explorer and a sociable visitor.

There is no attempt here even to outline Ernestine's long life (although her story deserves to be much more widely known). Rather, this article offers some glimpses of Ernestine's life and thoughts in her home territory in 1871 and 1872, as recorded in the fascinating journal that she wrote during that period[12]. The document is superb; it illuminates this short phase of its author's life, but also offers intriguing observations on contemporary affairs

[12] Grateful thanks are due to Rachel Hunt and Jane Evans, formerly with the National Trust at Cotehele, for transcribing and 'bringing to light' Lady Ernestine's diary, and also to Nick Stokes for allowing them to be shared.

at home and abroad, the interwoven upper-class lifestyles of the time, observations on the Royal Navy, and the landscapes and societies of the places she visits. Ernestine was in her late twenties

*Portraits of Ernestine taken in the 1860s. Both images are courtesy of Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections, ref. nos. 1653-ALB323-06-2 and 1653-ALB323-70-1*

at this time - an energetic and intrepid young adult[13], while also showing hints of the forthright and principled character that became more apparent in later life.

[13] Ernestine recorded that when family guests were leaving Plymouth by train, "I ran all the way to the Station to see them off: it was a sudden idea and I had not time to change my thin house boots which have scarcely any soles at all, and are moreover old: it was a

The passages quoted here are mainly confined to Ernestine's observations and experiences on or close to the Tamar; her vivid accounts of wider travels and encounters have been forgone, as have her running commentaries on current political affairs[14]. I have made minor adjustments to the original text for clarity or brevity, although most spellings and punctuation are as Ernestine wrote them. Some background is provided in footnotes.

Ernestine's records of her local adventures often included keen records of the local economy and society. We can imagine her on March 16 1871, observing and asking questions as she toured what had been the greatest of the Tamar Valley mines:
"In the afternoon I rode with Athole[15] to see the Great Devon

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most agonising proceeding, what with sharp stones which cut, and the hot pavement which burnt my feet!"

[14] As an example, she commented, with growing horror, on the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. On May 20 1872, she wrote: "It is too true. The Tuileries are burned to the ground having been fired with Petroleum by the Communists before they left. There is some hopes of saving a portion of the Louvre, but the Hotel de Ville, the Palais de la Légion d'Honneur, the Palais Royal, are in flames, it is believed that Notre Dame and the Hotel Dieu are burnt and so large a cloud hangs over the Sorbonne and its library that they fear that too is burnt. Although the Insurgents have been driven gradually back, yet they still hold out in many places, which are being shelled, and the streets are filled with wounded and dying. Was there ever anything so horrible dreamt of. Those French Communists must be worse than wild beasts."

[15] 'Athole' was the Hon. Atholl Liddell, who became the third Earl of Ravensworth of Ravensworthe Castle, County Durham. He was married to Ernestine's cousin Caroline, with whom Ernestine was very close – despite the geographical distance between their homes.

Consols. One of the Captains, a very civil man shewed us all over the Surface. The various shafts, buildings, aqueducts and waterwheels cover an immense extent of ground - several miles, altogether. We saw the Man-Engine but it was stationary: Memo, if I want to see it at work I must go between 1.45 and 2.15 p.m. We also saw the process by which refuse iron is converted by means of mineral water into Copper! A succession of tanks are filled with old iron over which the water is poured by means of a turning wheel placed horizontally and pierced with holes like the rose of a watering-pot. The iron after a short time appears coated with copper which they sweep off with a broom, and this is repeated until the iron has completely disappeared! By the time the water has passed thro' the last tank it is quite pure and fit for drinking. This is quite a recent discovery – within the last year or two. Previously the mineral water was supposed to be useless and, allowed to escape into the Tama, poisoned all the fish! We also went thro' the Arsenic works, which is made out of the mundic, and which we left with a most unpleasant choking sensation in the throat, and bad taste in the mouth: it must be terribly unwholesome to work, and we saw most of the men and boys had the lower half of their faces covered with handkerchiefs. We also saw heaps of red ochre which they also extract from the mine: in fact, everything seems to be turned to account. Our friend the Captain gave us some specimens of ore and before we left insisted upon taking us to his little office and presenting us with some apples. Athole is much struck with the civility of the people - so different to what he is used to in the North."

Almost a year later, Ernestine returned to Devon Great Consols and reported: "We saw all I did last year and also were taken on the little railway in a truck prepared with seats and cushions and

dragged by a little engine to where it descents to the Quays at Morwell Ham, the trucks ascending and descending partly by their own weight, and partly with the assistance of a stationary engine. Of course, we did not go down but returned the way we came. It is a very pretty road, through woods, and among the Morwell Rocks, with fine views of the river. We also saw the men coming from underground by means of the Man Engine. Our Cicerone was Mr. Richards the Chief Clerk."

There were many local trips on horseback or using carriages (Ernestine was a competent rider and driver). Some samples include: "August 27, 1872. A lovely day. Mamma, the Liddells, Bessie[16] and I drove to Callington, then took post horses and went to call at Endsleigh. A lovely drive. The Duchess being out we went on thro' Milton Abbot to Edgcumbe which we went all over and were delighted with the quaint old house and the carved R.E. 1292![17] Walked back thro' Endsleigh, sending the carriage to meet us, and had tea at the woodman's cottage. Home, by Stoke Climsland and Kit Hill about 9 o'clock."

The next month there were two rides to the east of the Tamar: "Had a lovely ride with Val[18], over Roborough Down to call at

[16] Bessie' was Ernestine's cousin Elizabeth, sister of 'Carry' Liddell.
[17] This is an especially interesting observation. Ernestine and her family party were visiting the medieval ancestral home of the Edgcumbes at Edgcumbe, just west of Milton Abbot, from whence came William Edgcumbe to marry Hilaria de Cotehele, hence beginning his branch of the family's route to fame and fortune.
[18] 'Val' was the family name for Ernestine's brother William Henry, who had become the 4th Earl of Mount Edgcumbe following his father's death in 1861. When still the heir to the earldom, he had the honorary title 'Viscount Valletort' – hence 'Val'.

Maristow. Sir Massey[19] was out. Rode home thro' Buckland Monachorum – a charming old village full of quaint houses – and crossed the Warcombe by Grenophen[20] (Mr. Chichester's) not far from Virtuous Lady Mine. Returned on horseback to Cotehele via Beer, Val riding with me. We crossed a little bridge over the Tavy at a place called Screech's Ford close to Virtuous Lady, and had a lovely ride round by Rumley and the Tamar to Ward."

Ernestine and her social circle were also frequent travellers on the Tamar. Her journal records travelling on a range of different vessels: "Left Cotehele to my very great regret. It is such a shame to leave the country just when it is getting so beautiful and go to that horrible London. The "Emperor"[21] went down at 9 a.m. with a schooner in tow – so I got a passage onboard her with my maid, luggage and dog Esau. I went straight to Stone Hall (the Edgcumbe family's residence in Stonehouse) and across with Bessie to Mt. E., returning in time for the 2.15 train at Plymouth."

Ernestine could wield an oar as well as handle horses: "Bessie's birthday. Went with her to Mt. Edgcumbe: got the Cutter and after picking up Carry and Athole at the Hard went to Torpoint – I pulled Stroke with Bessie No. 2. We went under the stern of the Agincourt, and in the Gallery saw one of our friends of yesterday, Commander Boyle. Mr. Boger's carriage met us at Torpoint and

[19] Sir Massey Lopes.
[20] Two misspellings here: 'Walkham' and 'Grenofen'.
[21] The paddle steamer *Empero*r was owned by the Devon & Cornwall Tamar Steam Packet Company, based at Calstock. The comment illustrates how steam vessels sometimes towed commercial sailing ships up and down the river)

took us to Wolsdon where we lunched and spent the afternoon: we pulled back in the Cutter and were home just in time for dinner"

However, river trips sometimes encountered mishaps and delays. On March 30, 1871, a 'large party' travelled up to Cotehele 'on the Steam Launch'. Although some of the passengers were very senior naval officers, "they embarked about 6 o'clock and in less than 5 minutes found themselves happily aground on the top of a mudbank, where they remained about half an hour, but at last succeeded in warping off by means of a kedge, we meanwhile watching them with great interest. "

Steam power clearly did not guarantee a trouble-free passage. Just over a year later, another trip to Cotehele had its embarrassing moments: "Very hot day. Started for Cotehele at 11.30: a large party in Steam Pinnace. Very low water and tide falling, so of course we stuck in the mud between Halton and Cotehele Quays. Luckily, we had some food with us, tho' no plates, knifes or forks, and were able to land ourselves and provisions with some difficulty. Lunched on the Beer side in a wooded valley – and then the punt having come to the rescue and the tide turned we pulled up in her and the Launch's Dingey."

Ernestine recorded more water-borne tribulations on Christmas Eve 1871, during a visit to Torpoint, via Stone Hall: "We started with an adventure, for not finding a shoreboat I routed out Jack and the Dingy, but we had fortunately only just left the shore, when I remarked that my feet were very wet, and we discovered the plug floating about in the bottom of the boat!. All this made us very late, and we found Bessie and George Earle waiting

impatiently for us on the Hard[22]. We set off as fast as we could – not a Fly[23] to be seen –and hurried on to New Passage, of course missed the Bridge[24] and had to take a boat, and on reaching Torpoint found Mr. Garett's carriage, which had been sent to meet us, had gone away on finding no one had come by the Bridge!" More hazards followed on the return trip: "In shoving off, our boatman clumsily got the boat's stern onto the hard, there she hung for several minutes: there was a great deal of wash, and I expected every moment to be capsized. However, we got off again allright."

A prominent thread in the journal reveals Ernestine's serious interest in the Royal Navy and its ships. This was doubtless fostered by the strategic position of Mount Edgcumbe overlooking Plymouth Sound and the Hamoaze, and the many senior naval officers in the family's social circle, which gave her privileged access to information and also to naval ships. She relished opportunities of first-hand observation, as on March 17 1871: "After a hasty breakfast we went to Mount Edgcumbe where Adml. Wilmot (2nd in command of the Channel Fleet) took us onbd. the Agincourt his Flag Ship in his Steam Launch. I had never been onbd a 5-master before: she is certainly gigantic and when below I felt quite bewildered: it really must take some time to learn one's way about and the division of the Lower Deck in compartments – or Flats – as they are called – separated by water-tight bulkheads is very confusing. We went all over the ship – the whole length of every deck, into the Engine Room and Stoke Room which contains 38 furnaces, to the end of the Screw Alley,

[22] Admiral's Hard at Stonehouse.
[23] A 'fly' was a light carriage, often available for hire.
[24] The 'Bridge' was the 'floating bridge' that operated the ferry service to Torpoint

down into the Carpenter's Store Room, and close on to the Ship's Keel, and I was immensely interested and amused. The Admiral gave us luncheon and he and Capt. Beamish were most good natured. We all bought some Ditty Boxes – i.e. Sailor's Work and Letter Boxes – value 1/3 each! But mine was kept onboard to have my initials carved on the top. We also carried off some excellent Ship's Cocoa."

A month later, Ernestine visited the training ship HMS *Cambridge*, moored in the Hamoaze. The visitors were granted demonstrations of live firing of torpedoes and guns. Ernestine was greatly impressed by the efficiency and discipline of the hundreds of trainee sailors on board: "All at once – at a sound of the Bugle – the 6 or 700 men came down the hatchway ladders at once, - bounding, jumping over each other, thundering down – anything to be first at the gun, - and before one could count 20 all the guns were loose and run out; a most marvellous sight, - as indeed was the whole of the gun-drill: During the whole drill the only man who utters a single word is the officer-commanding: the captains of the guns give their directions in dumb shew and not a man opens his lips!"

Ernestine was a well-informed ship spotter, keen to record her awareness of the fleet and its operations. In October 1871, she "saw 'Narcissus' and 'Cadmus' come into the Sound under sail[25] from Portsmouth. I launched the Narcissus at Devonport Yard, and take great pride in her. She is a beautiful frigate and looked her best to-day. She is Admiral Beauchamp Seymour's Flag Ship in the Flying Squadron, but she has come here to re-fit and he is

[25] Like many Royal Navy ships of this period, these ships used both sails and steam power.

not onboard. In the afternoon, I saw the "Indian Relief" troopship 'Serapis' leave Hamoaze with a Brigade of Artillery for India. Her enormous size struck us very much and from being painted white seems even larger than she is. The troops were very much cheered from the ships and shore as they went out."

On another occasion, she delighted in watching an impressive fleet arriving: "The Lords of the Admiralty came to Mt. E. and went with us to the Kiosk to see the arrival of the Channel and Reserve Fleets. It was a grand sight to see the fleet approach under canvass until within a mile of the Breakwater – 15 Iron clads in three divisions respectively by Rear Adl. Hornby – Commander in Chief, in Minotaur, Rear Adl. (Rim) Macdonald[26] in Agincourt and Rear Adl. Randolph in Achilles, commanding the Reserve Squadron. It was very fine to see them steam slowly in to take up their stations. We picked up Rim just as he was leaving his ship, put him on board Minotaur for a few minutes and then took him ashore, where he was to dine with the Marines." Ernestine recorded each vessel's tonnage and the name of her captain in her diary.

Her strong understanding of naval affairs gave Ernestine license to pass opinion on naval policy. In April 1872 she "returned to Cotehele, going with my maid and box by boat to North Corner, and passing the 'Gibraltar' sold out of the Service, and flying a red ensign, fitting out alongside the Dock Yard for a School Ship in

[26] 'Rim' was the family name for Admiral Reginald John MacDonald, who was the son of Caroline Anne, Ernestine Edgcumbe's aunt, who had married into the MacDonald clan.

Ireland: it is sad: such a splendid ship, and only commissioned once, I think Carry launched her at Devonport."

On Sunday December 8th, 1872, the South West was hit by a severe storm[27]. Ernestine was returned from Northumberland at the time, having visited the Liddells (her cousin, 'Carrie'). However, she described seeing the damage the storm has caused at Mount Edgcumbe on taking some guests for a carriage drive on December 11: "I could. have cried when I saw the destruction in the Avenue. On Sunday there appears to have been a perfect hurricane here, and 19 trees were blown down in the avenue, 11 all in one place. The road was impassable and it was not easy to find a way of driving up over the grass even."

Although covering just a short period of Ernestine's long life, the journal contains many more fascinating details and observations than can be accommodated here. I will close, self-indulgently, with a few of Ernestine's remarks relating to my own 'home patch' – the Bere Peninsula. Most of the parish of Bere Ferrers had passed to Edgcumbe ownership when Richard, 2nd Earl, married Sophia Hobart in 1789.[28]

Besides the substantial income from nearly all the property on the Bere Peninsula (and dues from its lead mines), the Edgcumbes had two other interests in the area. It became a popular shooting estate for the Earl and his guests. There are several short references to

[27] During this 'Great Storm of 1872', the Plymouth lifeboat *Prince Consort* rescued the crews of two ships that were driven ashore under Mount Batten, although in doing so was so badly damaged that she had to be replaced.

[28] The Hobarts of Blickling Hall, Norfolk had owned most of Bere since the late 17th century.

this Bere 'sporting' role in Ernestine's diary. On October 23 1872, Uncle G[29] and the three other gentlemen shot at Beer Barton – where they were joined by Mr. M. Collier 50½ Brace." The next day "the 4 gentlemen went to Beer to shoot, but the afternoon turned out so wet that they only shot 23½ brace." That December "Valletort, Charlie[30], Lord Gosford and Capt. Acheson went up in Adml. Stewart's steam pinnace to shoot at Beer, and afterwards on to Cotehele, where they slept."

The other distinctive link with the Bere Peninsula at this time was the Rector of Bere Ferrers and his family – the Reverend, the Honourable Walter Ponsonby, who had been granted the living by the Edgcumbes as lords of the manor and patrons of the living. Walter was from an aristocratic Anglo-Irish family (and later became the 7th Earl of Bessborough).

Ponsonby oversaw the restoration of St.Andrew's church, Bere Ferrers, although Ernestine revealed her frank - even waspish - side in remarking in March 1871: "Went with Carry and Athole to lunch with the Ponsonbys at Beer Ferris. They have begun to restore the Church by building two great granite chimneys with which we were horrified. I never saw anything uglier, or in worse taste." Nevertheless, she "went to dine and sleep at Beer Ferrers Rectory and went with the Ponsonbys to a Concert, in which the performers were all Beer people. The singing was really excellent."

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[29] Ernestine's Uncle George

[30] 'Valletort' was Ernestine's elder brother, William Henry, 4th Earl of Mount Edgcumbe, while 'Charlie' was their brother Charles. The arrival of a naval admiral's personal steam pinnace at Bere Ferrers quay must have been of interest to the locals.

The offending chimney fitted to St.Andrew's church, Bere Ferrers

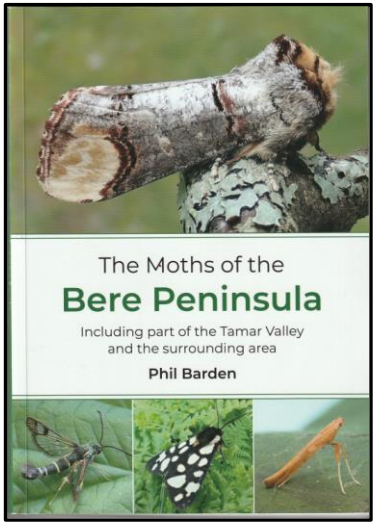
Despite her architectural critique, Ernestine went over with the Edgcumbe delegation to the re-opening of St.Andrew's in early September. "Bere Ferrers Church was re-opened by the Bishop of Exeter (Dr. Temple) after being restored. I went there for the morning service, It poured from 12 to 5, and about 180 people who were to have dined in the Rectory garden, had to come into the house and eat in relays. The Bishop preached twice. He had to hurry away directly after afternoon. service, but as the evening was fine we stayed for the public tea in the Chapel Schoolroom, and did not get home till nearly 9 o'clock."

Fortunately, a visit the following Spring met with more benign weather: "Flora and I drove to Bere Ferrers and spent the afternoon with the Ponsonbys. The weather all this week has been magnificent: cloudless skies and a hot sun, while the Cherry Orchards &c. are all at least a month in advance of last year. The country looks quite lovely."

# Book Review
# ‘The Moths of the Bere Peninsula including part of the Tamar Valley and the surrounding area’, by Phil Barden, self-published, 2024

***Clive Charlton***

Phil Barden claims that his book aims to ‘give some information on the 1000-plus specimens of moths that have been found on the Bere Peninsula and surrounding area’. Yet this is a modest understatement of what is a tremendously impressive achievement. Even for a non-specialist, the book is a wonder and a delight. It is based on Phil’s 15 years of dedicated, expert recording of moth species in the locality (the book is the result of over 62,000 records!). The time, energy and knowledge involved in that endeavour are remarkable enough, but Phil has also photographed many of the species with admirable skill. Most of the book’s 296 pages are enriched by splendid close-up photos, all in colour and mostly taken by the author. They leave us in doubt about the astonishing diversity and beauty of moths.




Phil stresses that the book is not intended as an identification guide, but is a methodical, structured record of the 1054 moth species recorded on the Bere Peninsula and in the 10km O.S. grid square SX46 in which the parish sits. Each entry is concise but

informative – an impressive compromise between sufficient descriptive explanation, brevity and attractive ‘accessibility’ - which is assured by all those delightful images There is a comprehensive index of common and scientific names.

The moths appear in their family groups, from Micropterigidae to Nolidae, via many other exotic names. Some families are represented by many species, while others have only a few; the ‘Bindweed Sleeper’ is the only member of the Bedellidae family worldwide – and has appeared here in the Tamar Valley.

The criteria used for each entry are explained clearly. The ‘arrangement of the accounts’ features the species code number, the scientific name, common name, length of the fore-wing as the key dimension, the relative frequency of the species within the survey area and beyond, its International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) conservation status (from ‘critically endangered’ to ‘least concern’), whether recorded on the Bere Peninsula (as opposed to only elsewhere in the survey square SX46), and the number of records of the species in the survey area. There is also a section on recording methods

Even a skim though Phil’s book will disturb our ‘popular’ images of moths (colourful glimpses on a summer’s day, fluttering visions drawn to lights at night, pests in the wardrobe…). There are so many forms and patterns, habitats and habits. The subtlety and intricacy of colouring and textures of wings and other body parts is a testament to the wonder of evolution. Some species are plain (if not ‘dull’), while others sport superb multi-hued camouflage or extravagant display. Moths can be straight and slender, or sport broad, sculpted wings. The Lunar Hornet Moth has evolved as a very convincing imitation of a real hornet, with transparent wings,

a yellow and black body and similar flight patterns and sounds. The size of the moths Phil has recorded also vary considerably: The fore-wing of the autumnal Nut-tree Dot, which favours Hazel leaves, measures a tiny 2mm, whereas those of several species of Hawk Moth can span up to 55mm. Hawk Moths also represent another way by which moths vary – they are often cross-Channel migrants.

The rich diversity of moth species reflects their adaptation to specific habitats. The Bere Peninsula and wider Tamar Valley possesses a fine variety of habitats. These are outlined in the introduction: woodlands, freshwater marshes and ponds, saltmarshes, grasslands, hedgebanks, orchards, gardens and allotments, and disused industrial sites. As many as 360 moth species have been recorded in Bere Ferrers Marsh, while 450 species were noted in the North Orchard in the village. Botanical diversity *within* these habitat groups underpins the multiplicity of moth species. In many cases, there is dependence on particular plant species (especially the dietary requirements of the larvae). Within the saltmarshes that fringe the Tamar and Tavy estuaries, the 'larvae of Saltern Tuft use the leaves of Sea Aster, while the larvae of Aster Straw feed on the flowers' of that plant. On patches of cleared woodland, Foxgloves often appear – and attract, appropriately, the fairly common Foxglove Pug moth. The larvae of the Barred Needle Miner are tiny enough to live *within* the needles of Scots Pine trees.

The very names of the moths and their species and families can be charming: Dwarf Pug, Satin Beauty, Spruce Carpet, Tawny Sycamore Pierce or bizarre tongue-twisters such as the Yponomeutidae, Roeslerstammidae, and Grasillariidae families.

This outline offers a mere glimpse of the moth marvels Phil presents in his ‘Moths of the Bere Peninsula’. One does not need to be a seasoned lepidopterist to find entertainment and enlightenment in the book – although enthusiasts will also find plenty of useful information. The book is an impressive joy, for which Phil deserves many congratulations.

*Available from Bere Alston Post Office, £15 or direct from Phil Barden phil.barden@tiscali.co.uk , £18 including postage.*

Photographs all courtesy of Phil Barden.

**Clouded Magpie** ***Abraxas sylvata***

Appears in summer, although quite uncommon on the Bere Peninsula. Feeds on elm suckers

**Lilac Beauty** ***Apeira syringaria***

Note the unusual ‘waved’ form of the fore-wings. The larvae feed on honeysuckle, ash and privet

**Mocha** ***Cyclophora annularia***

A relatively recent arrival on the Bere Peninsula (since 2019) . Feeds mainly on the leaves of field maples

**Pine Beauty** ***Panolis flammea***

Appears in Spring, although relatively rare on the Bere Peninsula. Larvae feed on pine needles.

**Pale Prominent** ***Pterostoma palpina***

The form and markings camouflage it ‘like a broken twig’

# ‘Plymouth’s Other Fleet’ – Gary Hicks’ maritime research legacy

## *Clive Charlton*

Some readers may be aware of the maritime history writing of the late Gary Hicks, who passed away in 2020. We published several of his articles in ‘Tamar’[31]. However, Gary’s research legacy is dominated by his thorough documentation and interpretation of ‘Plymouth’s Other Fleet’. In its focus on historical merchant shipping and shipbuilding, Gary did much to redress the relative neglect of the city’s rich mercantile maritime history (compared to the higher profile accorded to the Royal Navy and Dockyard). The research was available in CD-ROM format for some years, but Gary’s family have now generously made the material available for download, free of charge, via the ‘Plymouth’s Other Fleet’ website: www.plymouthmerchantships.info. In accordance with Gary’s wishes, his family want his maritime history work to be more widely available and used, not only by maritime historians, but also ‘those interested in economic and social history’ and genealogists. The new web-based resource is a superb and well-deserved way of ensuring his legacy. Although download is free, users are encouraged to give a donation in support of research to counter the scourge of pancreatic cancer, to which Gary succumbed.

[31] ‘Building at the Limit: Netstakes and the unlucky sisters’, *Tamar* Vol.36, 2014, pp.5-11; ‘The Schooner *Elizabeth Drew* and the Sims and Willcocks families of Gunnislake and Calstock, *Tamar* Vol.37, 2015, pp.14-22; ‘The Schooner *Ensign* of Calstock’, *Tamar* Vol.38, 2016, pp.39-48; ‘The Tavistock Gazette and Emanuel Crocker’, *Tamar* Vol.40, 2019, pp.14-19

Plymouth's Other Fleet' is a collection of pdf files containing approximately 5,500 A4 pages. It is easily searchable, with many cross-references using hypertext links. The core of the work is the 'Index' (in A-to-Z sequence) of over 2,500 vessels that appear in the Merchant Shipping Registers of the Port of Plymouth between 1814 and 1945, plus a further 800-plus fishing vessels in the Plymouth Fishing Boat Registers from 1880-1945. The 'Port of Plymouth' also incorporated the tidal reaches of the Tamar, Lynher, Tavy, Plym and Yealm rivers.

The contents and rationale for the Index are explained in detail in 'The Index Explained'. Only a summary is given here:
Vessels name; fishing boat number, official number (from 1855); rig carried by sailing vessel; place and date of construction / launch; builder's name and certificate; surveyor's description; previous port of registration (for vessels transferred into Plymouth ownership), dates of registration; details of ownership and transactions (often complex, given multiple owners, lenders and frequent ownership changes); fate and disappearance from the Plymouth Registers.

Gary's research was meticulous, exhaustive and orderly. The entries for each individual vessel are beautifully set in a rather delightful, distinctive flowing font, perhaps to invoke the appearance of the original hand-written scripts. However, Gary not only acquired, sorted and displayed his copious data – he also analysed and contextualised it imaginatively, as typified by the 'Fleet Perspective'. This 'standalone' section seeks to interpret the detail in the Index and other sections. It provides a useful reflective overview of Plymouth ship-owning over time, including changes in total fleet size (445 vessels in 1851), tonnages, rigs,

vessels that had been captured as war prizes, and ‘the fates of Plymouth vessels’.

The main sources for the Index were consulted in the National Archives in Kew and in the former Plymouth and West Devon Record Office (the latter now housed in The Box, Plymouth). Gary transcribed the vast array of records in the Plymouth Merchant Shipping Registers and Fishing Boat Returns in full, rather than merely producing a raw database. Where possible, he enriched the records of individual vessels from additional sources, including online newspaper reports from the British Newspaper Archive. These sometimes add considerable colour to a ship’s story. For example, in the case of the schooner *Tamar Queen*, launched in 1864 far up the tidal Tamar at Netstakes near Gunnislake, there are lurid news reports of ‘horrible tragedy on the high seas’, when several of the crew were murdered off the Azores by a recently recruited seaman who went berserk. For the Calstock-owned schooner *Ensign*, the Index entry details no less than four significant accidents. On the third occasion, the ship sank in Plymouth Sound after a collision but was raised and restored before a final demise on Blackstone Rock, Salcombe in 1915.

Gary inserted photographs and other images wherever possible, many of which are marked ‘from the author’s collection’. Inevitably, the photos tend to represent the later periods, although there are some earlier images of advertisements or news items.

The main Index of vessels from the Registers is supplemented by other significant and interesting sections. There are details of shipbuilding firms, and shipbuilding and repair yards, plus a gazetteer, explanation of sailing rigs, the extent of the Port of Plymouth, background to the shipping registers, and transcripts

Barge unloading at the head of Tamerton Lake (photo Gary Hicks)

of Acts of Parliament that had an impact on Plymouth's merchant shipping. To the non-expert in legal issues, these Acts can seem, at first sight, distinctly dry and impenetrable, with their precise legal terminology. However, a closer inspection can be fascinating. A few brief examples must suffice here.

Although earlier than most of the sources, an Act of 1709 confirms acceptance of proposals by Benjamin Joules of Plymouth to undertake regular dredging of the Cattewater and Sutton Pool. In return for 'cleansing shoals and banks' and 'carrying away sands, mud, clay, gravel, ouze (sic) and soil', Joules would be given a monopoly on 'ballasting and unballasting of all ships belonging to Her Majesty in Hammoaze, Cat Water or Sutton Pool'. An Act of 1866 orders the removal of customs duties on 'pepper of all sorts' and on British-registered wooden ships built in her Majesty's Possessions abroad. An 1867 act legislates on the carriage on ships of 'lime or lemon juice' for crews. However, only such 'anti-

scorbutics' that have been inspected in bonded warehouses could legally be deployed. The act also details regulations for the care and issue of such 'medicines'. Any 'default' from the regulations would incur a penalty to the captain 'not exceeding five pounds'.

Gary's curiosity generated a miscellany of other items in his compendium, under the disguising title of 'Plymouth Ships additions'. Among them is an article titled 'The Barges of the Four Rivers', an excellent analysis of the Tamar barges. There are also extracts from 19th century local newspapers, accounts of prominent maritime families based in Plymouth, such as the Shilstons and Peakes, and a long document on 'prizes' – i.e. captured enemy vessels that were brought into Plymouth and sold (thereby bringing considerable wealth into the town, especially in the early 19th century).

'Plymouth's Other Fleet' is not intended as a complete history of the port's mercantile shipping activity. It is largely confined to the 1814-1945 period and does not attempt to detail trades and cargoes (although there is an interesting account of the stone trade on the Lynher, the 'last bastion' of commercial shipping on the Tamar estuary system).

Gary Hicks was an indefatigable, committed maritime researcher, and a highly intelligent and perceptive thinker. He was also very generous with his time, enthusiasm and knowledge, and is much missed by those who knew him. Although recognised as an authority in his field by many in the local maritime history community, Gary's research legacy deserves a wider audience. Hopefully the Hicks family's kind placing of 'Plymouth's Other Fleet' online will help achieve these outcomes.

# A Glimpse of the Upper Tamar

With thanks to Pete Bloomfield – four photos of the upper reaches of the Tamar, an area rarely featured in this journal

The infant Tamar near West Youlstone GR SS270156). The Cornwall-Devon border runs down the middle of the stream!

Upper Tamar Lake, built as a reservoir in 1977 and now a popular coarse fishing venue, managed by the South West Lakes Trust.

Bridge over Tamar at Bridgerule. Here, the Tamar is wholly in Devon.

Tamar from Tamerton Bridge, North Tamerton. The river is wholly in Cornwall at this point.