

Principal Settlements

Newton Poppleford

Villagers from Aylesbeare settled at a convenient 'pebble ford' crossing of the river Otter after finding it a lucrative spot for trade. Originally the Roman route from Axmouth to Exeter, the road was improved in the 18th century. A toll house erected in 1758 still stands. A silk factory is shown on the tithe map of 1842 and a glove making factory existed in the early 20th century. The area was known for market gardening and fruit growing. The 'King Alfred' daffodil was bred here in the 1890s. The village retains some ancient cob and thatched cottages. The church was founded in 1331; the tower is 14th century, but most of the current building is a Victorian rebuild.

East Budleigh

The main street contains attractive cob and thatch cottages and some Mark Rolle workers' cottages with characteristic patterned brickwork and the MR initials. All Saints Church situated high above the village dates from the 14th century and has an unusually large number of late medieval decoratively carved pew ends. Sir Walter Raleigh was born at nearby Hayes Barton and is commemorated by a bronze statue. Close by is Bicton House, an impressive Georgian building, now a college. Formerly home of the Rolle family, it is approached by a unique avenue of Victorian monkey puzzle trees. The Italianate gardens, now separate from the house, were inspired by French designer, Andre Le Notre.

Colaton Raleigh

The manor had strong associations with the Raleigh family until the disgrace and execution of Sir Walter. Place Court, a small medieval house dating from the 13th century, was formerly owned by the Dean of Exeter and has a distinctive thatched cob wall surrounding the garden. It was later bought by the Rolle estate. The Church of St John the Baptist was extensively rebuilt in the 19th century but the fine 13th century arcade with transitional columns and the early 15th century tower still survive.

Otterton

Once a centre for the wool trade and a thriving port Otterton now reflects mainly its agricultural past. Its cob and thatch farmhouses, many with external chimney stacks, and the Mark Rolle estate cottages are ranged along a broad street with an open stream. The tower of St Michael's Church survives from the medieval period and the remains of Otterton Priory were incorporated into the manor house of the Duke family which stands nearby.

Budleigh Salterton

The insignificant hamlet of Saltré or Salterne, home to 'fishing farmers' and possibly salt workers, was virtually inaccessible until the roads were improved in the 18th and 19th centuries. A sizeable lime burning industry developed but until the 19th century the area was not perceived as having a great deal to offer. Although for most of its history it was the poor relation of East Budleigh and Otterton, Budleigh Salterton is now the largest settlement in the area.

The lower Otter valley has been inhabited since the Stone Age and successive stages of human activity have all played their part in shaping the area.

Land ownership records show that the royal manors of Otterton and Budley were granted to ecclesiastical foundations such as the Abbey of Mont St Michel in Normandy and later Syon Abbey and Polsloe Priory. When Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries in 1539 Richard Duke of Hayes Barton acquired most of the land which his family held until 1785. The estate was then bought by Denys Rolle of Bicton House. In 1842 the estate passed in trust to the Hon. Mark Trefusis who took the Rolle name. On his death in 1907, Lord Clinton inherited. Clinton Devon Estates still own the river and most of the land in the valley to this day.

Land use in the valley was shown by the Domesday Survey of 1086 as mainly arable but with substantial areas of meadow, pasture and woodland. Sheep and pigs were the main livestock at that time and a thriving wool trade developed in the Middle Ages. The open field system gave way to consolidated farms but mostly held as tenancies. Farming constituted the major employment in the area until the 20th century and the larger villages had smithies and wheelwrights to support its needs. Many labourers' wives made lace at home to supplement the family income. In the mid 19th century Mark Rolle started his work as an improving landlord. To his great credit he continued the programme during the depression caused by the influx of cheap foreign corn and meat. Despite immense changes in agriculture in the 20th century the landscape retains its diverse appearance. Mostly worked directly by Clinton Devon Estates the land supports a range of arable crops and both sheep and dairy farming.

Smuggling, mainly of wine and spirits, was a well-organised activity from the 17th century and few people had any qualms about cheating the government of customs revenue. Such was the degree of local involvement that it was extremely difficult to catch and convict smugglers. The Coastguard was set up in 1822 with stations in Budleigh Salterton and Ladram Bay. Their responsibility was to seize contraband goods and apprehend smugglers. The conviction of a prominent local smuggler, William Rattenbury of Beer, in 1835 was a rare success. Smuggling ceased to be profitable in the mid 19th century when government policy changed in favour of Free Trade.

Access

Buses serve the main settlements. Car parking is available in Otterton and at the Lime Kiln car park in Budleigh Salterton. From here the South West Coast path affords wheelchair access as far as White Bridge. An easy footpath extends to Otterton and other routes are signposted.

Further Information

The following sources have been useful in the preparation of this leaflet and are recommended as a starting point for further research.

Historical Guide to the Lower Otter Valley	Otter Valley Association
OVApedia, OVA's on line research archive	www.ovapedia.org.uk
Local History Collection	Fairlynch Museum
All About Otterton	Gerald Millington & Robert H. Jones
Otterton A Devon Village	E. M. Harrison
Mark Rolle: His Architectural Legacy in the Lower Otter Valley	Alan Ford, an OVA publication
The Book of Budleigh Salterton	D. Richard Cann
Budleigh Salterton in Bygone Days	J. Gooding, Mrs P. Norman, Mrs E. Spurway
Parishcapes Project	www.eastdevonaonb.org.uk

Otter Valley Association

Helping preserve and improve our local environment.

Acknowledgements

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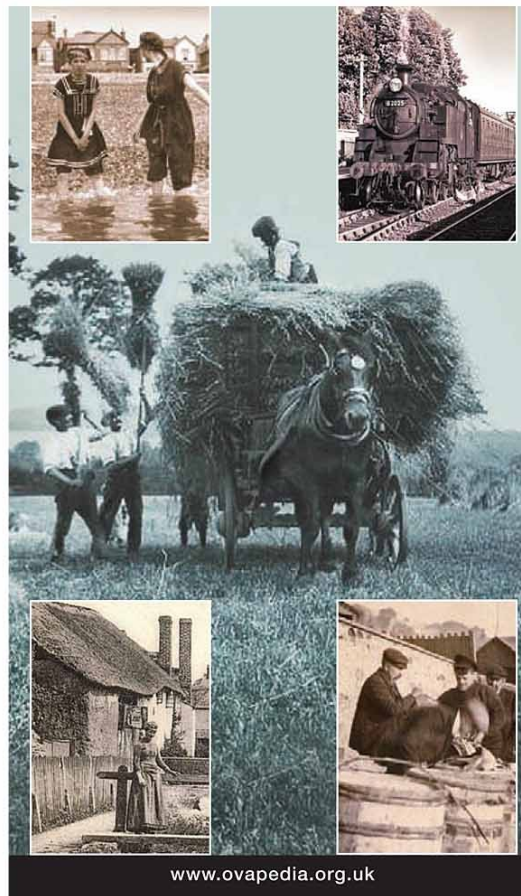
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DISCOVER HISTORY

IN THE LOWER OTTER VALLEY



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Shipping and trade were highly significant in the economic life of the area. The Domesday Survey records 33 saltworkers locally. Salt was highly prized as it was essential for the preservation of meat and fish for the winter diet and would have been a valuable commodity to trade. In the Middle Ages the river was much wider and navigable as far up as Otterton. The name of Anchoring Hill suggests a strong connection with maritime trade and old maps record the presence of docks at Bankley Wharf (thought to be near Pulhayes Farm) Kersbrook Quay, and Granary Dock. Boat building took place along the river until the 17th century. Local ships carried woollen cloth to Europe and returned with wine and other products. A combination of silt sedimentation and an eastward drift of beach pebbles has gradually barred the estuary, eventually rendering it unsuitable for navigation.

Fishing was an important activity along the East Devon coast. As late as the early 20th century a fleet of herring drifters fished at night and landed their catch on the beach in the morning. It was packed into barrels, taken to the railway station and dispatched to markets by train. The disappearance of the herring shoals brought the activity to an end. Crabs were caught in the summer months. Mackerel shoals used to come close inshore and were caught using seine nets from the beach. In its hey day several generations of the same family were involved in fishing but such activity is now on a very small scale. As the industry declined some fishermen found new opportunities by hiring out boats to visitors as the tourist trade increased.

The arrival of the railway contributed to the development of many Devon seaside towns in the 19th century. The lower Otter Valley was a late developer in this respect and it was not until 1894 that an Act of Parliament authorised the construction of a line from Tipton St John to Budleigh Salterton which was completed in 1897. Originally the line had two stations, East Budleigh and Budleigh Salterton but a station was opened in Newton Poppleford in 1899. A single track line with passing loops was extended to Exmouth in 1903. Steam engines hauled the trains until 1963 when they were replaced by diesel units. After the line closed in 1967 parts of the track became amenity walks and cycle trails. Budleigh Salterton station with its extensive goods yards and sidings became the site for a cash and carry business before being sold for housing development.

Seaside resorts began to develop in the late 18th century after George III made sea bathing fashionable. The monied and leisured classes quickly learned to value 'the salubrity of the air' and the romantic scenery of the coast. Budleigh Salterton grew from a small inconsequential hamlet to 'a pleasant and handsome little town' in less than fifty years. Many of its most attractive period houses date from the early 19th century including Fairlynch and The Octagon where Millais stayed while painting 'The Boyhood of Raleigh'. Hotels and lodging houses abounded and the town became known as a respectable resort with plenty of quiet entertainment to offer its visitors. Steamer trips to Torquay and Lyme Regis on the paddle steamers the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire were popular and still remembered in the name of Steamer Steps. Bathing machines were provided to take bathers into the water in privacy and were hauled up and down the beach using capstans. Small rowing boats were available for hire and a pleasant beachside promenade was constructed. Self catering accommodation for campers and caravanners at Ladram Bay proved popular from the 1930's onwards and the site gradually developed into the sizeable leisure complex of today. The original hotels closed one by one and were replaced with blocks of flats.



World War II saw the people of the Otter valley heeding the exhortation of the Ministry of Information to 'Keep Calm and Carry On'. They endured blackout and rationing, were fitted with gas masks, provided hospitality for evacuees and joined the Home Guard in common with the rest of the nation. Although it was never a major target a number of bombs fell in Budleigh Salterton, including one on St Peter's Church which was very badly damaged. A military training camp was set up in Dalditch. American forces were based in Budleigh prior to the D-Day landings in June 1944 and were visited there by General Eisenhower. The crumbling remains of the extensive wartime defences established in 1940 can still be seen along the seafront at Budleigh Salterton as a reminder of what Winston Churchill told the British people was 'their finest hour'.

A Brick Cross

A cross has stood here since 1580 when the Sheriff of Exeter ordered a witch to be burned on the site. It was later used as a hanging cross where convicted felons were suspended in chains and left to die slowly as a deterrent to others. In 1743 Lady Rolle ordered it to be embellished with direction plaques and religious texts.



B Salem Chapel

Salem Chapel is a recently restored 18th century Dissenters' chapel. Refusal to attend the Church of England attracted severe penalties until toleration was granted to Protestant Nonconformists in 1689. Built in 1719 the chapel has a gallery with period box pews supported by cast iron columns. Its roof had a concealed attic space which could only be reached from the outside and was used for storing smuggled goods.



C Route of the old railway line 1897-1967

The route of the London and South Western Railway track which linked Budleigh Salterton to Tipton St John and hence with the Waterloo-Exeter line is still visible in some places along the river. Its brick viaducts can still be seen at Kersbrook and beside the footpath off South Farm Road. The former East Budleigh station building on the outskirts of Otterton remains but is now a private house.

D Gas Works

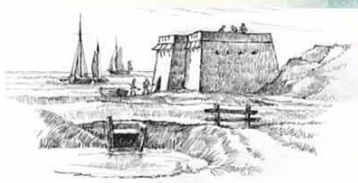
Gas was manufactured and used locally in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Built in 1867 to provide gas for street lighting in the town the Gas Works stood at the junction of Granary Lane and Stoneborough Lane. Subsequently many residents had gas installed in private houses and businesses. The coal from which the gas was extracted was delivered onto the beach from colliers at high tide.

E Coastguard Station

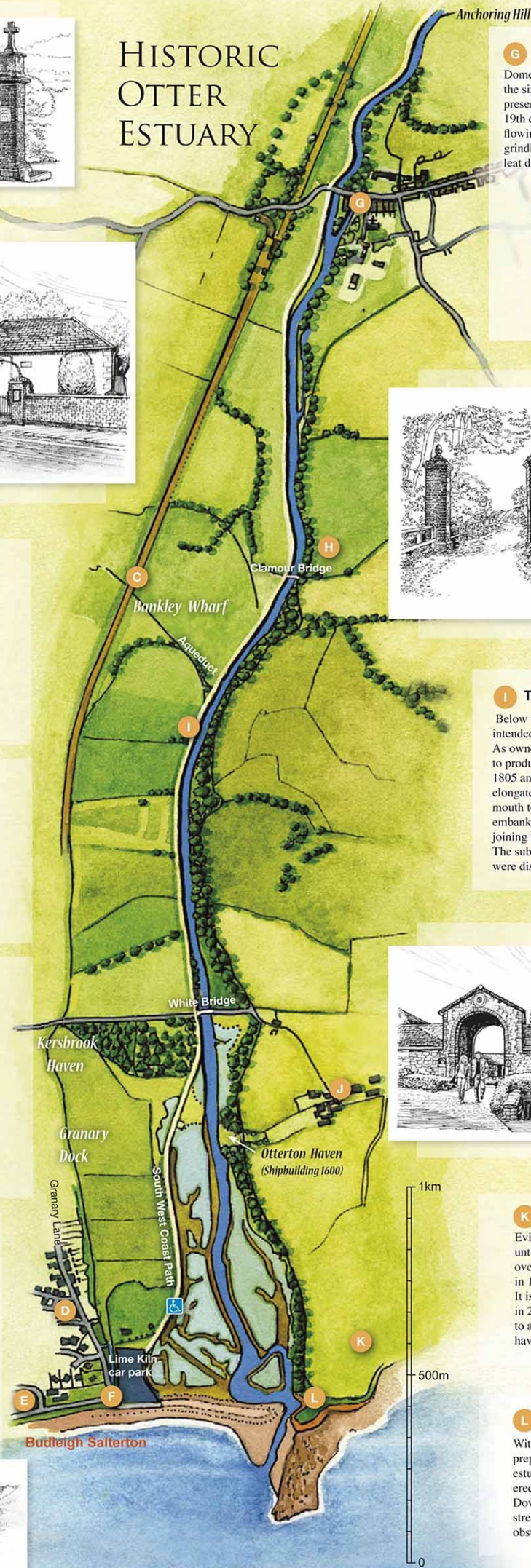
Smuggling was rife along the Devon coast in the 18th and early 19th centuries and even clergymen were involved in concealing smuggled goods. Various attempts to stamp out the practice culminated in 1822 with the formation of the Coastguard. Early photographs show a watch house established in Budleigh Salterton (Marine Parade) and in the 1870's the coastguard station was relocated to a higher site on the cliffs with a boathouse on the edge of the beach below. The ten cottages, chief officer's house and rocket cart shed still stand.

F Lime Kiln Complex

Until the development of artificial fertilisers in the 20th century lime was used extensively for soil improvement and as a constituent for the local building material, cob. It was extracted from limestone by burning it with culm (coal dust) in specially constructed kilns. The remains of the large complex of lime kilns are visible near the car park but others were located on the opposite bank, further up river. The materials were brought by sea and landed on the beach from where trucks on a tramway were winched up by a horse-powered capstan.



HISTORIC OTTER ESTUARY



G Otterton Mill

Domesday Book records three mills at Otterton, indicating the size and prosperity of this settlement in 1086. The present mill retains one working waterwheel which is a 19th century Poncelet type with paddles and relies on a fast flowing stream to turn it. Regular demonstrations of flour grinding using the massive millstones are held. The mill leat draws water from the river upstream of the bridge.



H Otterton Park

The red brick gate piers on the road above the Clamour Bridge and some fine trees are the only remains of an 18th century grand design to build a mansion for the Duke family. Financial difficulties and the death of Robert Duke meant the scheme was shelved. A golf course existed there in the 1890's prior to the establishment of the East Devon course to the west of the town. During the 1920's and 1930's an airstrip on the site was used by Alan Cobham's 'Flying Circus' which was very popular with local people.



I The Embankments

Below the modern footpath are embankments which were intended to prevent flooding and reclaim land for pasture. As owner Lord Rolle was able to commission James Green to produce plans which were implemented in stages between 1805 and 1815. The line of the embankments followed an elongated figure of eight pattern stretching from the Otter mouth to the highest point of the tidal flow. A smaller embankment continued along the line of the river before joining the Budleigh brook on the outskirts of East Budleigh. The subsequent effects on fishing and shipping activities were disputed for many years.

J South Farm

Most farmers in the area were tenants of the Rolle Estate. The Hon. Mark Rolle was responsible for the rebuilding of many farms and the provision of better housing for agricultural workers. At South Farm in 1869 a complex of new buildings was added to the existing farm house and a late example of his workers' cottages can be seen at 1-3 South Farm Road. The bricks were supplied by the brickworks at Otterton which also made tiles and pipes.



K Roman Villa

Evidence of Roman occupation of the area was sparse until Roman tiles and pottery were found in a field overlooking the mouth of the Otter. Limited excavation in 1989 uncovered a stone building with hypocaust tiles. It is thought likely that a Roman villa existed on the site in 2nd/3rd centuries AD but the evidence is insufficient to allow a reliable attribution. Much of the site may have disappeared over the cliffs as a result of erosion.

L WW2 Fortifications

With a real threat of German invasion in 1940, preparations were made to protect the coast and key river estuaries from sea-borne landings. Gun emplacements erected on Otterhead, above the estuary and at Blueberry Downs still remain. A scaffolding and wire barrier was stretched across the beach and a few cylindrical anti tank obstacles are visible in the river at low tide.

