

Welcome to Lopwell

Lopwell

Lopwell was a traditional river quay serving nearby mines and farmland, and used by the monks of Buckland Abbey. Silver and lead were once exported, and coal and lime imported. From the mid 19th to mid 20th centuries, pleasure steamers from Plymouth also used to call in here.

Lopwell has long been a tidal fording point, and a ferry also operated here until around 1930. Before the dam was built, the river was navigable further inland. Upriver were Lopwell lime kilns, where lime was burned for use in sweetening the soil. There was also a small quay where flat-bottomed Tamar barges brought 'dock dung' (sweepings from the streets of Plymouth), which was used as a fertiliser, returning with woodland products.

Plymouth City Council built the dam in 1953, incorporating a fish pass to allow migration upriver to spawning grounds. The old pumphouse beside the car park, (which featured as the surgery in the 1990's BBC TV series "The Vet"), was replaced by a new underground pumphouse in 1981. This is now covered by a Butterfly Meadow, open to the public. The old barn next to the public toilets is now a Camping Barn.

Mining

Mining of silver and lead near here dates from the 13th century, and by the 19th century industry was thriving. Across the river, on the Bere Ferrers bank, was a small community, with buildings associated with Lopwell and Maristow mines, served by an inn. The last cottage was abandoned in 1956, and for many years traces of its market gardens remained visible as the woodlands encroached - also covering wooden chalets once used by visitors from Plymouth. The area had a working mill until 1872 (an old mill stone is set into the wall at the car park entrance).

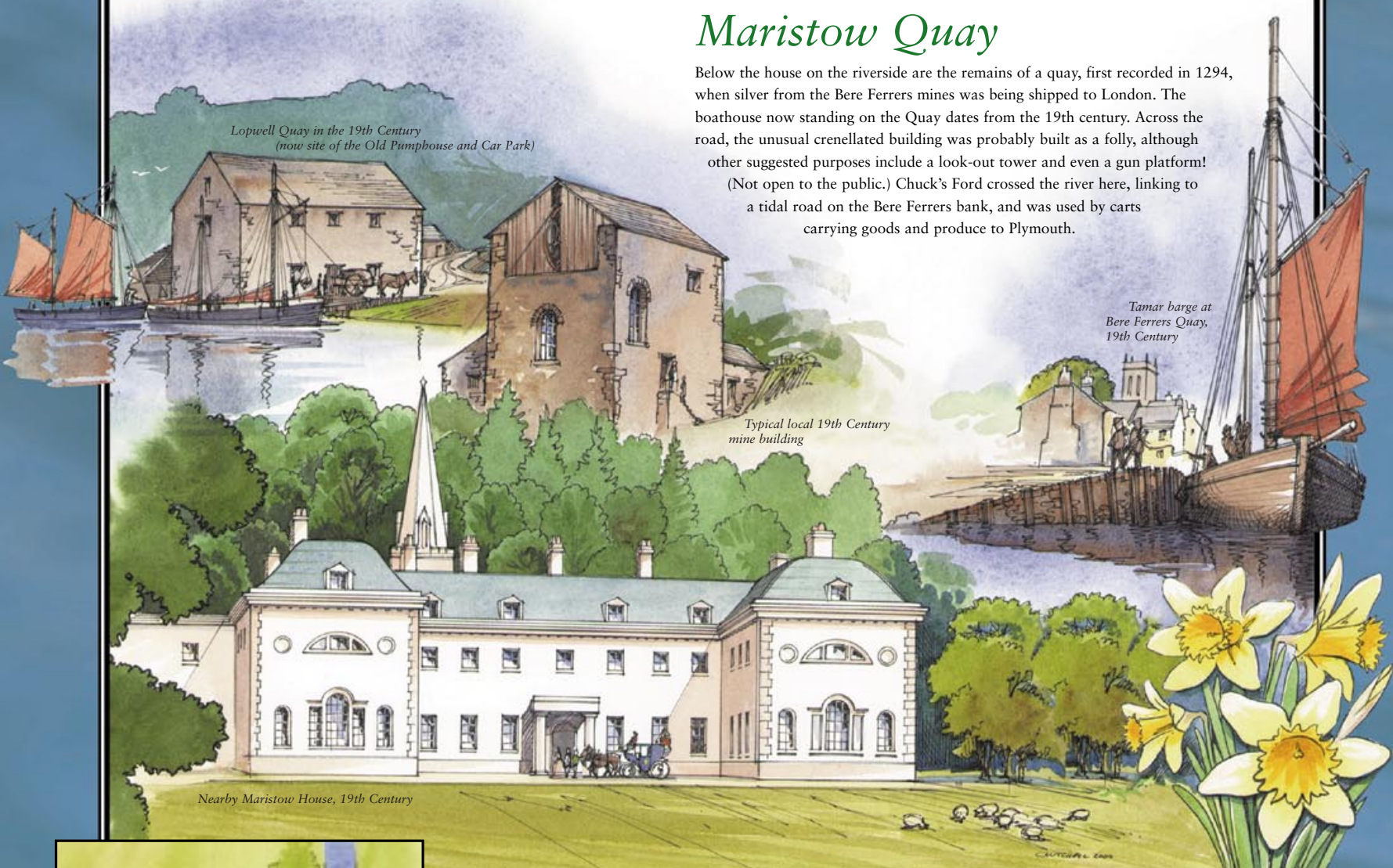
Maristow

The Heywood family built an imposing Georgian mansion here in the 1760s (which was extended and altered in 1907). In 1798, the house and estate were bought by Jamaican-born Mannasseh Masseh Lopes, son of a wealthy plantation owner, whose family became Lords of Roborough. Their seat was at Maristow until 1938. Above the house rises the spire of St. Martin's chapel, built in 1871 as a successor to an earlier 14th century chapel here.

After the Lopes family left, the house served a variety of purposes: a servicemen's hospital during the second world war; a retirement home for clergy; a residential school, and a field study centre. Following two disastrous fires, the house has now been carefully restored as twelve private homes, (not open to the public).

Maristow Quay

Below the house on the riverside are the remains of a quay, first recorded in 1294, when silver from the Bere Ferrers mines was being shipped to London. The boathouse now standing on the Quay dates from the 19th century. Across the road, the unusual crenellated building was probably built as a folly, although other suggested purposes include a look-out tower and even a gun platform! (Not open to the public.) Chuck's Ford crossed the river here, linking to a tidal road on the Bere Ferrers bank, and was used by carts carrying goods and produce to Plymouth.



Lopwell Quay in the 19th Century
(now site of the Old Pumphouse and Car Park)

Typical local 19th Century
mine building

Tamar barge at
Bere Ferrers Quay,
19th Century

Nearby Maristow House, 19th Century

Local Information

There are toilets close to the car park, next door to the Camping Barn which is owned by West Devon Borough Council. This is available for hire, but must be booked in advance - Tel. 01200 420102

WALKING ROUTES

The Tamar Valley Discovery Trail passes through Lopwell. This walking route runs for 30 miles in total - between Plymouth and Launceston. However, there are many short circuits and village trails along the way, offering a range of enjoyable day walks. An Information Pack is on sale at local Tourist Information Centres. To sample a short section, why not follow the apple waymarkers and walk along the embankment path to nearby Maristow Quay (see map).

CYCLE ROUTES

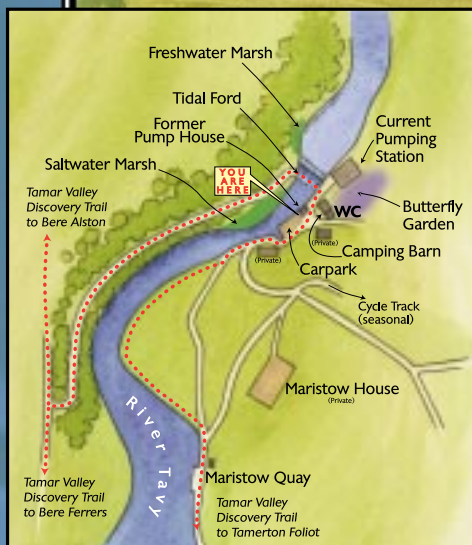
Lopwell is also accessible by bicycle - either from the Bere Peninsular Cycle Route or by using the Lopwell Link from the Plym Valley Cycle Way.

Note: The local South West Lakes Trust Ranger for Lopwell can be contacted on 01822 852435

Enjoying Your Visit

Please take care of yourself and help us to protect the wildlife of this special place:

- Don't get stranded! The causeway across the river is completely covered at highwater - it is essential to check the tide times notice board before crossing
- Please take your litter home
- Please do not light fires or camp
- Please clean up after your dog and keep them under close control
- Swimming is not allowed above the dam and canoeing is only permitted on the tidal waters, downstream of the causeway
- No public fishing is permitted upstream of the Dam.



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KEY



Reed Beds



Saltmarsh



Lopwell lies beside the Tavy estuary, which forms part of the Tamar Estuaries system.

The Tamar Estuaries are one of Britain's finest examples of a "ria" (a drowned river valley). The rich wildlife in and around the Estuaries ranges from ancient woodlands and saltmarsh, to rare insect life.

Internationally-important populations of birds use the Estuaries over the winter, or when passing through on migration.

In recognition of the quality of this environment, the Estuaries have been afforded international and national designations to protect the features which make them so special.



Saltmarsh Saltmarshes are generally scarce in the Southwest. The extensive marshes found in the estuaries of the Tamar, Tavy and Lynher make up over 30% of Devon and Cornwall's resource of saltmarsh, and are a particularly important feature of the area. Saltmarshes are dominated by a small number of salt-tolerant plants, including grasses, sedges and rushes. They are an important habitat for insects, including the "Short Winged Cone Head", a rare bush cricket. At high tide,

saltmarshes provide a valuable refuge for juvenile fish, such as Bass.

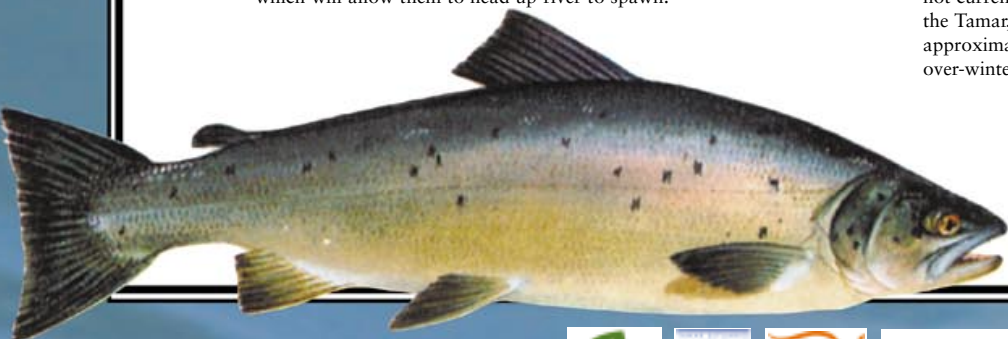
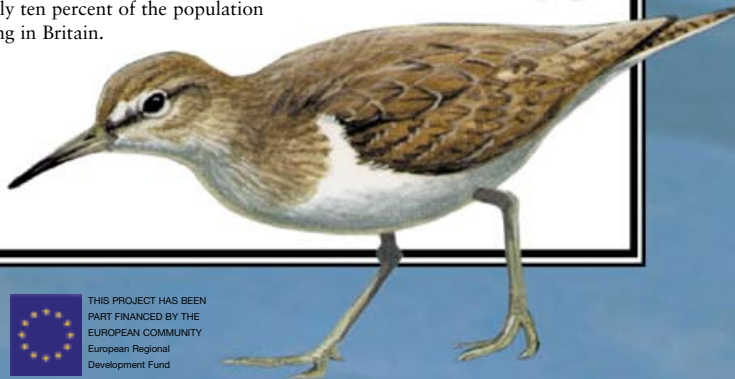
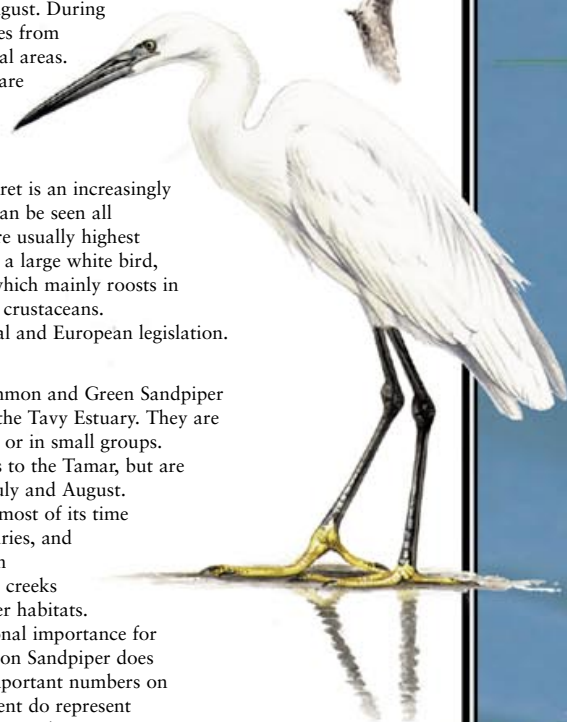
Ancient Woodland Ancient woodland clings to the steep slopes, cliffs and rocky outcrops on the fringes of the Estuaries' margins. The woodland provides a home for many species of insects, fungi and lichen. It is typical of Southwest England, and is a very important feature of the Tamar Estuary. It provides good shelter for wildlife, and roosting and breeding sites for some birds, including Little Egrets and Herons.

Salmon The Atlantic Salmon is a relatively large fish, which can exceed a metre in length and weigh over twenty kilograms. The Salmon must pass through the Estuaries on their upstream migration to spawn in the freshwater reaches. Juvenile Salmon (parr and smolts) spend the first two years of their life in fast-flowing streams before migrating out to sea. Adults feed at sea and accumulate in the lower Estuaries to await the spate conditions which will allow them to head up-river to spawn.

Kingfisher The Kingfisher is perhaps one of the most spectacular sites you may see along the margins of the Estuaries. It is a small bird, distinctive through its dazzling blue and red plumage. It is usually seen singly, either darting across the water or perched by the water's edge. As its name suggests, it feeds mostly on small fish plucked from the water. It is seen throughout the Estuaries, and is most common between March and August. During the winter, the Kingfisher migrates from freshwater to estuaries and coastal areas. In some years, more Kingfishers are recorded in the Tamar Estuary than in any other in Britain.

Little Egret The Little Egret is an increasingly frequent sight in the Estuary. It can be seen all year round, although numbers are usually highest in late summer and autumn. It is a large white bird, similar to a Heron but smaller, which mainly roosts in trees and feeds on small fish and crustaceans. The Egret is protected by national and European legislation.

Sandpipers Both the Common and Green Sandpiper can be seen close to Lopwell on the Tavy Estuary. They are wading birds, usually seen singly or in small groups. They are relatively scarce visitors to the Tamar, but are most likely to be seen between July and August. The Common Sandpiper spends most of its time along rocky foreshores and estuaries, and feeds on invertebrates. The Green Sandpiper is found along estuary creeks and in saltmarshes and freshwater habitats. The Tamar Estuaries are of national importance for the Green Sandpiper. The Common Sandpiper does not currently reach nationally important numbers on the Tamar, but the numbers present do represent approximately ten percent of the population over-wintering in Britain.



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