CHURCH OPE COVE PROJECT RESEARCH GROUP

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The History, Myths and Legends of Church Ope Cove Project

Church Ope Cove is one of the most treasured areas of Portland. Celebrated as the original ‘opening’ to the Island, it was defended by Rufus castle, overlooked by St. Andrew’s Church, and the place where John Penn chose to build his home of Pennsylvania Castle. Connected to Wakeham, (the Island’s historic administrative centre) Church Ope was home to St Andrew’s, Portland’s first parish church, and is regarded as one of the most significant spiritual sites on the Island.
In its more recent history, this spirituality has been replaced by a Romantic idealisation, as artists, writers and visitors have been entranced by its historic ruins and folklore. Indeed, the cove itself has come to attract a significant folk mythology; from legends surrounding its location as Britain's first Viking attack, to the stories of smugglers and buried pirates. While these myths continue to be well publicised, they are in need of re-examination and a gentle unpicking to unfold and open up the unique histories of this vital and influential place.

As part of this project, the Church Ope Cove Research Group has delved into the history of the cove, seeking out new and hidden stories of this fascinating area of Portland, and dispelling many myths along the way. While there are histories written about Church Ope Cove and its landmarks, in the past, many have tended to prioritise the activities of a few elite individuals and monarchs, rather than examining the experiences of ordinary people

who would have lived and used the cove. From the lives of early Portlanders, who would have visited the cove for fishing, to quarrymen at work in the surrounding quarries, and most recently, the vital place Church Ope Cove has had as a place of recreation and leisure, treasured by Portlanders and visitors alike. It is a history worth celebrating for its diversity, as well as being a microcosm of the wider history of Portland and all the changes that have occurred there over the centuries.

The History, Myths and Legends of Church Ope Cove is an arts and heritage project run by Portland Museum in partnership with b-side and made possible with funding from Arts Council England. In the first phase of the project, from October to December 2019, Research Coordinator, Bea Moyes, was commissioned to bring together a group of local residents to explore the history of the cove. The group participated in key research skills workshops, joined a guided tour of Church Ope Cove by archaeologist Gordon Le Pard, and visited local archives including the Dorset History Centre, The Portland Heritage Trust Study Centre, and Portland Museum. They also conducted their own research in archives and collections, spoke to experts, and recorded interviews with residents who shared their lived memories of the cove. The research the group gathered is recorded in this report and will be used to inspire new interpretation for the museum and an artist's creation for b-side festival in 2021. Portland Museum presents this report, not as the final word on the history of Church Ope Cove, but as a catalyst to spark further research, and perhaps, even much needed preservation work, into a rich but sadly neglected area of the Island.

This report has been made possible by the hard work and research of the members of the Church Ope Cove Research Group: Mike and Helena Berry, Alan Tune, Andrea Frankham-Hughes, Anthony Carbis, Fleur Adams Johnson, Ian Baird, Jane Miles, Jill Proctor, Karena Heals, Kit Berry, Paul Fitzpatrick, Paula Stott, Persefoni Salter, Suzy Kirby, Rikk Butler, Sharon Ganther, Stella New, Andy Dowler, Tony Mackinder, Vicky Marshall and Zoe Anna. *Where no name is entered under the research subject title, the research was written up by Bea Moyes and undertaken by Bea and members of the group.

We would also like to thank all the experts and local residents who have shared their knowledge with us, with particular thanks to: Amanda Wallwork (b-side), Stuart Morris (local writer and historian), Shirley Mitchell (The Portland Heritage Trust Study Centre), Jacqui Halewood and Luke Dady (Dorset History Centre), and Jane White (Portland Court Leet). This report would not have been possible without the help and support of: Lucy Watkins, manager of Portland Museum; Angela Scott, Trustee of Portland Museum; the volunteers at Portland Museum.

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The Earliest History of Church Ope Cove

Research by Andrea Frankham Hughes

There is significant evidence for the occupation of Portland by Palaeolithic nomadic hunter gatherers and mesolithic peoples from approximately 9,000 - 12,000 years ago. These people would have likely known and used Church Ope Cove. Portland has a key Mesolithic site at Culverwell (located to the north of Portland Bill and within walking distance of Church Ope) that suggests long term occupation, with evidence of hearths, a limestone floor, walls, and various flint tools. There is also evidence of ritual objects indicated by a pierced scallop shell and a round pebble placed under a triangular slab of limestone.[1]

As a semi-nomadic people, it is likely that these Mesolithic inhabitants of Portland would have been familiar with Church Ope Cove, particularly given its easy access to the sea for fishing. Additionally, a neolithic arrowhead was discovered on the cliffs leading down to Church Ope Cove, and mesolithic tools in the form of chert scrapers, (a digging stick weight and abraded weight) have been found within walking distance of the cove by what is now known as Bumpers Quarry, suggesting direct use of the area around Church Ope.[2] The area now known as Suckthumb Quarry, to the south-west of Church Ope Cove, also has evidence of long term occupation in the shape of a bowl barrow - a bronze age cemetery of 200 buries with urns and beehive huts. Made from slabs of limestone, the beehive huts at Suckthumb Quarry are around 2.7m in diameter and 2.4m high. The archeologist Susann Palmer has suggested they are Neolithic in origin but were also used by Iron Age occupants - and possibly in Medieval times, also.[3]

Iron Age and Roman archaeology on Portland is also quite common, suggesting significant settlements on the Island during these periods. The Romans had large settlements on the mainland in Dorset: Dorchester, the port of Clavinium at Radipole, and the Roman Amphorae at Weymouth Bay. In 2004, an archaeological site at the playing fields at Weston Road found several walls of Roman structures, an Iron Age roundhouse, a large medieval building, and, possibly, a Saxon long house; suggesting a multi-era site within walking distance of Church Ope Cove. Fragments of Roman pottery were also found in the clay levelling materials used in the floor of St Andrew's Church at Church Ope Cove. Roman finds have been found at excavation sites at nearby Fancy's Close and Bumpers Lane. Indeed, it is known that the Romans prized Portland Stone and used it to make large stone coffins which have been found around the Island and beyond, suggesting there was a valuable stone trade from Portland at this time. It's likely that much of the stone excavated during Roman times would have been extracted from the

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[1] Susann Palmer, *Ancient Portland: Archaeology of the Isle* (1999), p. 27

[2] Susann Palmer, *Portland: Archaeological inventory of sites and finds*, p. 50 and 56-58.

[3] Ibid, p. 100-103

rock faces surrounding Church Ope and exported by sea from the cove, rather than being taken with great labour over Verne Hill.

While there is little physical evidence of Saxon habitation on Portland, apart from a few shards of pottery found at the Weston Road multi-age archaeological site, the Saxon tradition of building homes from wood and straw with no foundations makes the evidence of Saxon settlement more sparse than other periods. However, at Church Ope there is considerable evidence that St Andrew's Church was originally built on Saxon foundations. In his examination of St Andrew's in the late 19th century, J. Merrick Head suggests that "a portion of the walls remaining on the northeast side are of Saxon origin. There are some of the characteristics of that time, but no opinion is ventured on this matter".[4] These Saxon remains were also suggested in archaeological digs at the church in the 1970s and 1980s, with the additional discovery of a possible Saxon well to the north of the building which has never been fully excavated.[5]

Saxon inhabitation of Portland is also clear in the Domesday Books written in 1086, twenty years after the invasion by William the Conqueror in 1066. The record for Portland states:

> *"The King holds the island called PORLAND. King Edward held it during his life. The King has 3 ploughs in lordship; 5 slaves. 1 villager and 100 smallholders, less 10, have 23 ploughs. Meadow, 8 acres; pasture 8 furlongs long and 8 wide. 3 cobs; 14 cattle; 27 pigs, 900 sheep. This manor with what belongs to it pays 65, blanched"*.[6]

This suggests that the manor of Portland was a substantial and rich settlement with some strategic importance. This Saxon settlement on Portland is still very visible in the landscape of the Island and around Church Ope. The salt pans, which are still visible on the East Weares, were, according to Stuart Morris, "an important industry from Saxon and Norman times. Portland had two salt pans, one at the Mere and one at East Weares under Grove point".[7] The influence of Saxons on Portland is also clear in the system of lawnsheds/lynchets, which are still visible around Southwell and Portland Bill but were, until recently, common across the Island. This Saxon field system was, and continues to be, administrated by the Court Leet, who would collect land taxes on behalf of the Crown. The organisational structure originated from the Saxon system of gavelkind which entitled all members of a family to inherit land equally. Saxon influence can also be seen in the place names of Portland, with the village of Wakeham signifying the original meaning,

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[4] J. Merrick Head, *Isle of Portland: The ruined Churches of St Andrew* (1897), p. 127.

[5] Alan Hunt, *Notes on the excavation at St Andrews in the 1980s*, Portland Museum Archive (PSA81 VII Context 3116)

[6] *Translation of the Domesday Book*, https://hydra.hull.ac.uk/resources/hull:461

[7] Stuart Morris, *Portland: An illustrated History* (2016), pp. 13 - 14.

‘Watch Valley’, suggesting the early importance of Church Ope as a look-out point and entryway onto the Island.

It is clear from the archaeological evidence that early occupants of Portland lived near, and would have been familiar with, Church Ope Cove. As a key beach, and entry point onto the Island, it’s likely that the cove would have been used by these people for not only food and water, but also for trade; although no direct material evidence pertaining to these activities remains. In his book ‘The Mariners of Ancient Wessex’, David Williamson proposes that early Neolithic people formed a complex network of trading by moving goods up and down the south west coast using dug out logs that subsequently progressed to boats made from animals skins.[8] A log boat found in Poole harbour, dating from around 200 - 400 BC, could have held cargo of up to 1.5 tons, (or a crew of 16 - 18 people) suggesting the kind of craft that might have visited Portland at Church Ope.[9] With the building of St Andrew’s Church and Rufus Castle by the 12th century, it is clear that Church Ope was a place of high status. A status suggested in its earliest history and use.

One of the most common legends attached to Church Ope Cove is that of its position as the site of the first Viking raid on England in 787 AD. In her book ‘*Old Portland*’, Clara Jane White mentions ‘talks of landing of the Danes, or, as they said “the red headed wildmen”, who used to land in the night on the beach, treating people cruelly and carrying off the children’.[10] White suggests that these raids were remembered by generations of Portlanders, suggesting ancient memories of ‘the harrying, burnings, carrying off of children”, and in his book ‘*Portland: An Illustrated History*’, Stuart Morris refers to myths told to 19th century children, of ‘cruel wild men who come over the beach in the middle of the night and carry away naughty children’.

Though the folk histories of a Viking landing at Church Ope are popular, there is no direct physical evidence of Viking incursions at Church Ope or at any place on the Isle of Portland. The first recorded encounter with the Vikings in England comes from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, commissioned by King Alfred the Great in the late 890s. There are several versions of the Chronicle that were copied from the original, including Chronicles A & E which mention the Isle of Portland. Chronicle A, also known as the Winchester Manuscript, was copied by a scribe at Winchester. It is the oldest surviving manuscript of the Chronicle from the late 890s which is held at Corpus Christi College in Cambridge. Chronicle E, known as the Peterborough Manuscript, is the latest version of the chronicle and is held at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. It was copied by a scribe after a fire at the monastery at Peterborough in 1116. These Chronicles have been interpreted differently by many scholars. In his translation of Chronicle A in 1913, J.A. Giles suggests the chronicle reads:

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[8] David Williamson, *The Mariners of Ancient Wessex* (1998), pp. 4-21

[9] Jessica Berry, David Parham and Catrina Appleby, *The Poole Iron Age Longboat Project*, http://www.thisismast.org/projects/poole-iron-age-logboat-project.html

[10] Clara Jane White, *Old Portland*, 1983, p. 64

> *"A 787. This year king Bertric took to wide Eadburga, king OiFa's daughter; and in his days first came three ships of Northmen, out of Hasretha-land [Denmark]. And then the reve rode to the place, and would liave drive them to the king's town, necause he knew no who they were : and they there slew him. Theses were the first ships of Danishmen who sought the land of the English nation".*[11]

In another translation of Chronicle A, first published in 1996, Michael Swanton suggests the chronicle reads:

> *"A 787(789) Here Beorhtric took as his wife King Offa's daughter Eadburh: and in his days there came for the first time 3 ships of Northmen from Hordaland: these were the first ships of the Danish men which sought out the land of the English race".*[12]

Michael Swanton also translates Chronicle E:

> *"E787(789) Here Beorhtric took King Offa's daughter Eadburh. And in his days came first 3 ships of Northmen from Hordaland: and then the reeve rode there and wanted to compel them to go to the king's town because he did not know what they were: an then they killed him. These were the first ships of the Danish men which sought out the land of the English race".*[13]

None of these early chronicles mentions Portland as the place where this first Viking landing took place. The Chronicles of St Neots, written in Bury St Edmunds between 1120 & 1140, are the first to suggest that the earliest landing was on Portland but do not explicitly mention Church Ope Cove. In his translation of the Chronicles of St Neots, Michael Swinton says, "they landed on the Island which is called Portland". However, this chronicle is written nearly 350 years after the first raid and it is not clear where the detail of landing on Portland came from.[14]

However, despite this, the story of the Reeve coming down to meet the Viking ships could be accurate. It was customary for any arriving merchants to be taken to the king to pay tax. The idea that the presence of the Vikings was regarded as hostile fits with the kind of edicts in West Saxon King Ine's reign (688-726). He decreed that 'If a man from afar, or a stranger, goes through the woods off the highway and neither calls out nor blows a horn, he may be considered to be a thief, to be slain or to be redeemed by paying his wergild

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[11] J.A.Giles, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles,* (1913), http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/657

[12] Michael Swanton, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, (Routledge, 1998). p. 54

[13] Ibid, p.55

[14] Thomas Williams, *Viking Britain*, (2017), p.1.

(man price)'. At the time King Beorhtric reigned over Wessex, this would have been common practice and strangers were not very welcome, let alone Vikings. [15]

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles however, do document later Viking raids on Portland. The Chronicle A, translated by Michael Swanton, reads:

> *"837 [840] Here Ealdorman Wulfheardfound at Southampton against 33 ship-loads […] And the same year Ealdorman AEthelhelm fought against a Danish raiding party on Portland with the Dorset men, and for a good while they put the raiding army to flight- and the Danish had possession of the place of slaughter and killed the ealdorman".*[16]

The Chronicles of John of Worcester, written in 1120 - 1140, state:

> *"A.D.837… Ethelhelm, the ealdorman, with the assistance of the people of Dorsetshire, engaged in a battle with the Danies in the territory of Port [Portland Island], and compelled them to a long retreat, during which he received a mortal wound, and the Danes got the victory".*[17]

The Abingdon Manuscript, known as Chronicle C, also suggests there was a raid on Portland in AD 982, "Here in this year three ships of Vikings came up in Dorset and raided in Portland. The same year London town was burned".[18] The Saxon Chronicles also suggest another attack in 1052:

> *"Anno MLII (1052). In this year died Alfgyfu sunna, the mother of King Edward and King Harthcnut Earl Goodwin together with his fleet hoisted his sails and they at once betook themselves to Wight (the Isle of Wight) and there landed […] and then they went westward until they came to Portland and then they landed and did whatever harm they could do".*[19]

Although there is no documented evidence for a Viking raid on Portland in 787AD, could these later accounts of skirmishes on Portland be connected to Church Ope Cove? In the late 10th and 11th centuries, the cove would have looked quite different from the beach we see today, with a sandy beach making it easy for flat-bottomed Viking longships to land. However, it has been suggested that a better landing site may have been to the north of the Island at the Mere. The Dorset re-enactment group, 'Hrafnslith', have

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[15] Ibid, p.3.

[16] Michael Swanton, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, (Routledge, 1998) p.62.

[17] John of Worcester, *Chronicon ex Chronicis*, http://www.bsswebsite.me.uk/History/JohnofWorcester/Chronicle_John2.html

[18] Michael Swanton, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, p. 124.

[19] J.Merrick Head, Isle of Portland, in *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club*, ed. Morton G. Stuart (1891), p. 116.

suggested this may be more likely because as a marshland, (before it was drained in the 19th century) it would have been a good place for flat-bottomed longships to land.[20]

The most significant evidence for the importance of Church Ope Cove as a landing site comes with the building of Rufus Castle in 1142 to defend the cove. The cove was clearly of strategic significance and mentioned in the Saxon Chronicles for its wealth, which may have made it a target in the 9th and 10th centuries for Viking raids. The construction of Rufus Castle by William Rufus in the 1100s shows that the Island was felt valuable and important enough to defend with a high status building, and Church Ope Cove was considered an important access point to enter and exit the Island.

[20] Dorset re-enactment group, Hrafnslith, speaking to Andrea Frankham-Hughes (November, 2019).

The Changing Landscape of Church Ope Cove

Research by Jane Miles

Church Ope Cove, and the weares to the north and south, have undergone significant changes over the past 500 years due to the actions of both natural forces and human intervention. These include geological processes such as landslips and erosion, the quarrying of Portland Stone, and, in latter years, vegetation growth. In some cases, quarrying activities have benefitted from the results of the geological processes and in others, the after effects of quarrying have triggered landslips and other possible changes to the beach. These significant changes to the landscape have had a profound influence on the history of the cove and on its uses over time.

There are few accurate maps, drawings or paintings which depict the landscape of the Cove and East Weares five centuries ago. However, what illustrations there are, suggest a very different east coast of Portland than that which exists today. An early map of the Island that was drawn up between 1580 and 1594 (below), gives some guidance as to how the landscape may have been shaped.[21] This early map shows that to the north of the cove there were possibly cliff faces with land at the base extending out into the sea, where Penn's Weare currently is. To the south, there appear to be cliffs extending all the way towards Portland Bill. Current Ordnance Survey Maps also show Penn's Weare to the north of the cove, however, the significant difference is that to the south, there is an area marked 'Southwell Landslip', with no evidence of the cliff faces mapped in the 1500s.

[21] Map (1580) in Gillian Hackman, *Stone to Build London* (2014), p. 25

To understand these changes, it is helpful to consider the geology of Portland as a whole. In simplistic terms, the Island is made up of several different strata, (or beds) of rock. These are layered on top of one another and, due to major geological forces in the distant past, are tilted downwards towards the south-east, at around 1.5⁰.[22] The main beds containing Portland Stone sit on top of the Portland Sand formation and Kimmeridge Clay. Portland Stone is prone to slippage across these underlying beds, particularly when they are saturated with water.[23] Indeed, there is evidence of underground watercourses across the Island, one of which emerges as a well at the back of the beach at Church Ope Cove, and also behind the ruins of St Andrew's Church.[24]

The actions of tidal processes have also been instrumental in removing the Kimmeridge Clay from around the shoreline, creating space for the other beds to move seaward.[25] The Portland Stone beds are heavily jointed, with gullies and fissures criss-crossing the beds at regular intervals, the major ones also being orientated to run parallel to the south-east.[26] All of these beds were formed many millions of years ago, with the jointing taking place during a major geological force following formation, as the joints and gullies cut down through all the beds rather than just one or two.

Although no maps are available to consider these changes, legends speak of considerable changes to the eastern coast of Portland around 1000AD. There are references of a “Great Sea Flood” which apparently hit the south-coast of England in 1014. The Anglo Saxon Chronicles refer to a “great sea-flood” the eve of St Michael’s day, “which spread wide over this land, and ran so far up as it never did before, overwhelming many towns, and innumerable multitude of people”.[27] And, other more contemporary sources repeatedly referred to this memorable storm, or tsunami. There are also legends of an earthquake which apparently hit England in 1048, however, there are little direct records of this. In response to a letter from Imperial College department of Science and Technology in 1977, regarding evidence of this earthquake, they suggest that the only evidence of an earthquake in the Dorset area is in Sherborne in 1761.[28] It is possible that this earthquake was perhaps a large landslip to the south-east of Portland, around Church Ope Cove, which might fit with the legend suggested by Clara King-Warry in *The*

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[22] Mark Godden, *Stone Mining on the Isle of Portland* (2014), Albion Stone PLC

[23] Gilliam Hackman, *Stone to Build London* (2014)

[24] E. D. K. Coombe, *Some Aspects of Coastal Landslips at Portland* (1982)

[25] A. Strahan, *The Geology of the Isle of Purbeck and Weymouth* (1898)

[26] The South Western Stone Co. Ltd, *Portland and its Stone* (1859)

[27] The Anglo Saxon Chronicles quoted by Ian West, http://www.southampton.ac.uk/~imw/chestorm.htm

[28] Letter to Ms M. Kielmas, County Reference Advisor, Imperial College of Science & Technology; (1977)

High Place, which argues that St Andrew's Church was once in the middle of the Island, but was drawn towards the east coast due to considerable landslips.[29]

Landslips have had a dramatic effect on the weares to the north of Church Ope Cove. Some of these have occurred naturally, however, some have been triggered by human intervention in the form of quarrying. In both instances, there have been similar outcomes. Brunsden notes that officially recorded details of landslips only go back as far as 1615.[30] From this date, until 1792, there are eleven recorded landslips to the northeast of the Island; the area covering Penn's Weare. These were nearly all in the winter months when the rain levels would have increased. There have been several minor slips since this date, most notable during the construction and running of the railway. Stuart Morris has suggested that the line for the Easton and Church Hope Railway Company was constructed around 1900 and ran beside the East Weares at the base of the cliffs. This line was always at risk of land movement and there was a huge slip in 1907 when the line dropped 40ft (12m) resulting in major repairs.[31]

Recorded Landslips in the Church Ope Area[32]

- **1615** February 2nd
- **1665** February 2nd
- **1694**
- **1695**
- **1708**
- **1734** Great Southwell Landslip
- **1750**
- **1792** February 13th

With reference to the levels of quarrying taking place in the Church Ope area, Gill Hackman has written that these landslips were significant, (especially in the early days) in terms of the export of stone from the island. Landslips on the cliffs created problems for quarrymen by damaging their workings, roads and piers, but may also have helped them by exposing fresh stone.[33] Stuart Morris also notes that on the cliffs above the piers, the

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[29] Clara King-Warry, *The High Place*, Dorset History Centre (VX195/N/DP Box), p. 5-9.

[30] D. Brunsden, The structural morphology of the Isle of Portland in *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association* No. 107 (1996), pp. 209-230

[31] Stuart Morris, *Portland: An Illustrated History* (2016)

[32] E. D. K. Coombe, *Some Aspects of Coastal Landslips at Portland*, (1982)

[33] Hackman, *Stone to Build London* (2014)

stone was reamed off and tumbled onto the weares below.[34] Quarrying activity in the cliffs upset the natural processes, and consequently, enormous falls often coincided with peak production. They were of a mixed blessing. On one hand, they exposed wide faces of fresh stone; on the other, they destroyed the vital roads and even the piers on the water's edge. The quarrying processes to which both Hackman and Morris refer involved the quarrying of the prime Portland Stone. This involved removal of the overlying beds and also generated a certain amount of waste during the extraction of the stone blocks. It was general practice to tip the spoil and waste over the cliffs and down onto the weares below. The weight of this waste put pressure on the beds beneath, leading to slippage across the Kimmeridge Clay layer and causing the land to slip. These slips would have exposed fresh faces of Portland Stone, often along the joints and gullies, which were then quarried and the waste once again thrown over the cliff, possibly resulting in more landslips. Subsequent slips in the same area resulted in the land slipping and pushing up against the previous occurrences, resulting in an undulating landscape that can be seen today. There are also outcrops of rocks visible across the weares and at Church Ope Cove they are tilted forward as a result of sliding down during these landslips.

The impact of these landslips in the 17th century was felt most by the quarry industry. Piers built at Church Ope Cove, and to the north to facilitate the loading of the stone onto boats, were damaged by a landslip in 1665. This destroyed the piers and the roads, preventing the loading of the stone.[35] Stuart Morris writes that following the Great Fire of London in 1665, when Sir Christopher Wren was using Portland Stone to rebuild parts of the City of London, money was made available by the Commissioners for the rebuilding of the piers and roads that were destroyed by the 1665 landslip.[36] Unfortunately, in February 1696, a great landslip again destroyed the piers, the cranes, and the roads leading to them. No stone could be loaded onto barges and the work on St Paul's halted for a year or so until the piers and roads were repaired once again.

To the south of Church Ope, there was a major landslip on the cliffs in 1734. This is now known as the ‘Great Southwell Landslip’; one of the largest ever to occur in the United Kingdom. During this landslip, several hundred metres of cliff slid downwards, in a forward toppling motion, towards the sea. The actual cause of this landslide remains largely unknown. Although it has been suggested that the landslip was due to quarrying, which has contributed to the slips north of the cove, it is more likely that wetter, colder conditions, in the years known as ‘The Little Ice Age’, were the cause.[37] Although the slip

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[34] Morris, *Portland: An Illustrated History* (2016)

[35] Hackman, Stone to Build London (2014)

[36] Morris, *Portland: An Illustrated History* (2016)

[37] A.P Dykes, ‘A New Assessment of the Southwell Topple of 1734’ in *Landslides and Engineered Slopes* (2016), Edited, Aversa *et al,* Associazione Geotecnica Italiana, Rome

has subsequently been covered with quarry waste and vegetation, large blocks of forward tilting rock can still be seen along the length of this landslip today.

There is one aspect to the changing landscape that is difficult to quantify - the beach at Church Ope cove. Currently, the beach is covered with pebbles and shingle, with a small area of sand uncovered at low tide. However, there is anecdotal evidence that the beach was originally a sandy beach. TM has said that when he was young, around 70 years ago, the beach had far more sand than it does today and was high enough up the beach to be visible at all tide states.[38] Indeed, there is speculation that the pebbles and shingle have been deposited as a result of quarry waste ending up in the sea and being washed ashore. A visit to the beach supports this somewhat as there are chunks of Portland Stone lying on the beach and some of the pebbles are clearly Portland Stone that have been rounded by wave and erosive actions.

[38] TM; Church Ope Project, 2019

Rufus Castle

Research by Karena Heals and Alan Tune

It is believed that Rufus Castle, also known as ‘Bow and Arrow Castle,’ was originally built overlooking Church Ope Cove in 1142 and that it was later rebuilt in the 15th century as a fortification to protect the Island. As Portland was an island rich in stone, farming, and fishing, the castle’s placement in looking out over Church Ope Cove suggests the significance of the cove itself, and its defensive role during this period.

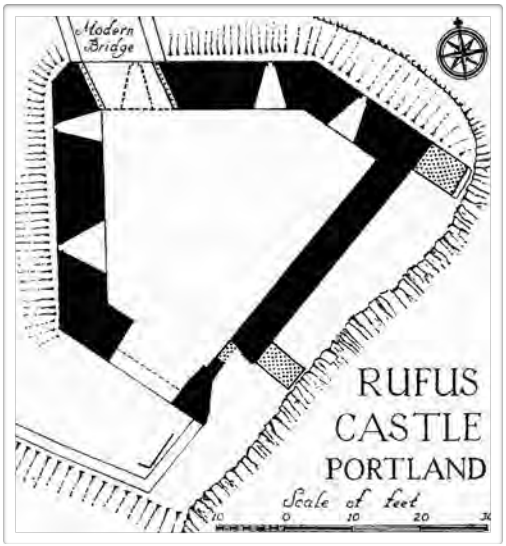
The earliest record of a 12th century defensive building, comes from a period known as ‘The Anarchy’ (1135-1153), which came about through a dispute between King Stephen and Empress Matilda, the daughter of King Henry I. The Empress invaded England in 1139, and in 1142, with the siege of Oxford in progress, her half-brother, the Earl of Gloucester, successfully captured the building. In December 1257, Adomar Winton, the Bishop of Winchester, was granted a licence to ‘strengthen the island of Portland with stone and lime and to crenellate it like a castle, as he shall think expedient’.[39] The licence was passed to Richard de Clare, Earl of Gloucester when he bought the island. However, there appear to be no further records of this castle or its location.

The present ruins have been dated to the 15th century, suggesting the castle was rebuilt, (possibly with funding from Richard Duke of York) sometime between 1432 and 1460. It continued to act as a defence against foreign raiders into the 16th century. However, with the construction of Henry VIII’s Portland Castle in 1539-1541, it is believed that Rufus Castle fell into disuse.

[39] https://www.portlandhistory.co.uk/rufus-castle.html

The building that remains today is made of Portland Stone, built in an irregular pentagonal shape, with a number of late-Medieval gunports on all sides. In his account of Rufus Castle in 'The History of Dorset', John Hutchins describes the Castle as:

> *"a very ancient castle, in form of a pentagon, full of small loop-holes, thence vulgarly called Bow and Arrow Castle […] But little mortar or cement has been used in the construction of the walls which are roughly built of native ashlar. Three of the sides are considerably larger than the two others. On the next the cliff are no openings, which shew that it was originally constructed on the edge of the cliff. On the opposite side are two openings of about ten feet in height from the cills to the apex of the pointed arches which are splayed internally to a width of about 8 feet narrowing to about eighteen inches […] There are four other openings in the face towards the East and a smaller one over a gateway in the narrow north-east face".*[40]



Some of the original castle has been lost to erosion and collapse over the years, leaving only some parts of the outer bailey sections of wall. An account of the castle in Grose's Antiquities states: "a little to the Eastward of the Old Church (St Andrew's) and fifty steps of stone above it appears to have been the keep of the Castle". However, by the time of J. Merrick Head's excavations of St Andrew's in the 1890s, these steps seem to have disappeared. This deterioration provides some clue as to why Rufus Castle was superseded by Portland Castle in the 16th century. Despite its strategic position, the precarity of its existence due to landslips and erosion at Church Ope Cove limited the of the castle and led to its abandonment.

By the 18th and 19th centuries, it was the romantic idyll of these ruins that attracted many writers and artists to Church Ope Cove, including J.M.W. Turner, who drew the castle in 1811. John Penn, who built nearby Pennsylvania Castle at the turn of the 19th century, was charmed by Rufus Castle's ruins. He claimed them as part of his estate, and to

[40] John Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset Vol.II* (1774), pp. 816-7

enable his personal carriage to visit them, built the rounded arch bridge that runs from the castle over what is now Church Ope Road. Instead of its functional use as a defence for the Island, Rufus Castle became a symbol of old Portland, both in its longevity and loss.

In the 20th century, the castle continued to fall into disrepair and was left to ruin. Photographs show it overgrown with ivy. Many Portlanders we spoke to as part of this project recalled childhoods climbing around the ruins of Rufus Castle, enjoying its walls as a playground rather than a historic monument. Writing for this project, Alan Tune recalls that:

> *"The castle was a great place to explore and play the games of boyhood imagination, and the ruin was accessed by climbing the wall of the lane and effecting entry via trespass - which added a certain edge to all subsequent proceedings".*[41]

Others recalled seabirds nesting in the holes at the top of the tower that they would climb up the walls to catch, or to procure fresh eggs from. However, by the 1950s, it was clear that the castle was in need of protection and conservation, becoming a Grade I listed building in January 1951, and a scheduled monument under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act in 1979. In 2010, after many years work, English Heritage granted £150,000 for urgent restoration and consolidation work on the castle. Having been on the 'heritage at risk' register, it was in need of immediate work, and although some emergency repairs had been carried out to stabilise the ruins, the major restoration project did not commence until 2010. The historic building and church architect, Russ Palmer of Honiton, drafted a schedule of the repairs, with the work carried out by Carrek Ltd, in the same year. Conservation work was completed to secure the north walls, including core drilling, removal of ivy, and repointing. As the 19th century bridge had caused structural problems, the wall above it was strengthened with anchors, and partially rebuilt. The castle remains on the 'heritage at risk' register with need of further repairs and conservation, but is no longer in the same imminent danger as it was at the start of the millennium. Today, it is a designated site of Special Scientific Interest, (SSSI)

[41] Alan Tune, *Research Report for Church Ope Cove Project* (November 2019).

which has given it added protection. * Since the first version of this report was published, further work to protect the integrity of the castle has taken place by the current owner/ custodian and Historic England. There is also a virtual tour of the castle available at portlandmuseum.co.uk thanks to a project funded by ArtFund.

St Andrew's Church

Research by Kit Berry & Vicky Marshall

The ruins of St Andrew's Church, which sit just above Church Ope Cove, are all that remains of Portland's first known parish church. Evidence from excavation of the ruins in the late 19th century, and again in the 1970s and 80s, suggest that the site has been in use since Saxon times and the ruins that exist today are the result of later attempts to rebuild the church after foreign invasions and landslips.

Legends suggest the church and priory were once situated at the very centre of Portland, known as the 'High Place', significant for its astronomical and ceremonial situation. In her account of Portland's history and folklore, Clara King-Warry recalls a "vague story" that the site was once occupied by the temple of Venus, which was "beloved by Druids and Phoenicians", and was likely connected to the May Year and the "alignment of the rising sun at Belaine". Although, as King-Warry states, these legends are "guess-work", their long existence in Portland folklore suggest the spiritual significance of the St Andrew's Church site, which continues today.[42] Indeed, as King-Warry records, as late as 1823, pagan rituals were still being performed at the church, including the ritual of passing a child through the cleft of an ash tree (one of which once stood by Pennsylvania Castle) as cure for a hernia.[43]

The church as it can be seen at Church Ope today, was originally built around 1100 by the Benedictine Monks of St. Swithun in Winchester, who were bestowed the Isle of Portland in 1042 by Edward the Confessor. The site became an important religious centre, but, after the Norman conquest of 1066, reverted to the control of the King. In 1340, the French invaded, and landing at Church Ope Cove, they destroyed the church. Again, in 1404, the church was destroyed after it had been rebuilt. It was dedicated to St Andrew, the patron saint of fishing in 1475, suggesting a connection to the maritime nature of its location at Church Ope Cove. Around the same time, a tower was added, which was separate to the main church building.

The first reference to St. Andrew's Church comes from John Leland in his description of Portland written between 1535 and 1543:

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[42] Clara King-Warry, *The High Place*, Dorset History Centre (VX195/N/DP Box), p. 5-9.

[43] Ibid, p. 19.

> *"There is a castelet or pile not far from the streate and is set on a high roche hard by the se cliffes a little above the est end of the Church. The Paroche Chirch taht is but one at this tyme in the isle is large and somewhet low builded in the hanging rootes of an hille by the shore. The Chirch and Paroche is about a mile dem. to go the next way to it from the Kinges New Castelle in the Isle […] sum say that in tymes past there was a nother Paroche Chirch in the Isle but I there lerned no certente of it. There be very few or utterly no trees in the isle saving the elmes about the Chirch […] The personage sette in the High Streat is the best building in the Isle. The Bishop of Winchester is the Patrone of the Chirch".*[44]

In his work, 'The History and Antiquities of Dorset' (1861–1873), John Hutchins described St Andrew's Church as having a:

> *"Chancel and body very low and tiled which seemed to have been built at different times. The tower was plain and moderately high, but had no bell in it and was detached near a yard from the body. The inconveniency of its situation was owing to the pretended want of depth elsewhere. The Churchyard was made ground have rise to a tradition that it was anciently in the centre of the Island which extended to 'The Shambles'".*[45]

He goes on to describe the reason for its abandonment as being due to its difficult situation on the edge of the cove, describing it as:

> *"large, Ancient, but rude fabric situated at the southern extremity of the Island, so near that to preserve encroachments, the Islanders were obliged to wall the banks to an incredible height".*

The church has been victim to a number of landslips at Church Ope, including a significant slip in 1625 when much of the graveyard and surrounding land fell into the sea. It was at this point that the large wall described by Hutchins was likely built to shore up the land. However, this was followed by another landslip in 1675, and yet another in 1734/1735, which left the church in a state of disrepair. In August 1753, a meeting concerning the church's future was held in the parish vestry and attended by: Reverend John Cooth, churchwardens, Edward Pearce and Colpass Attwooll; the builder/architect, Thomas Gilbert; and landowner and quarry merchants, John and Richard Tucker. The committee submitted a report on November 2nd stating that the church was in such a state of ruin that it would be "extremely imprudent for the inhabitants to put themselves to the expense of a thorough repair of the same, since it appears to us that such repairs must cost more than half the expense of building a new Church". They described the "dangerous" condition of the present church and agreed to Thomas Gilbert's plan for a new church at the west end of Reforne, (what is now St. George's Church) which was

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[44] Leland quoted by J.Merrick Head, 'Isle of Portland' in *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club,* ed. Morton G. Stuart (1891), p. 121.

[45] Hutchins quotes by J.Merrick Head, 'Isle of Portland' in *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club,* ed. Morton G. Stuart (1891), p. 123-125.

formally approved on November 8th 1753. St Andrew's Church was officially abandoned in 1756. Largely demolished, material from the building was used for the building of St George's Church, which was completed in 1764 and consecrated in 1766.[46]

The Old Parsonage, (or Old Vicarage) was situated higher up the hill at the tail-end of Wakeham. Some called it 'The Oratory', and originally, it could perhaps have been a home or chapel for the monks. Certainly from illustrations that have survived, it had the look of a chapel, or at least a holy house. It was later used as a parsonage for the rectors of Portland but during the English Civil War, when Portland as a Royal Manor was pro-Royalist, it was looted and destroyed by Parliamentarians. At that time, Dr Humphrey Henchman, rector of Portland and Wyke Regis, was ejected and replaced by Henry Wey, and Dr Henchman's extensive library, situated in the Old Parsonage, was burned. The ruins of the beautiful, ancient building were sadly destroyed in 1917.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the remains of old St Andrew's Church fell into a state of ruin, both due to landslips and the move of the congregation to the new St George's Church. The site was first excavated in the 1890s by J. Merrick Head, an amateur enthusiast who was then the owner of Pennsylvania Castle. However, by the early 20th century, access to the church had become increasingly difficult, as a letter from John Pearce to Southern Times in 1909 suggests:

> *"that inhabitants have not that free access to the graves of their ancestors which they formerly enjoyed is nothing short of a scandal, and undoubtably there is a very strong feeling abroad that the present condition of affairs ought not to be tolerated any longer […] The churchyard should certainly be under the control of the Local Authority, who could arrange for the man responsible for the scavenging of Wakeham to be in charge of it to prevent any sacrilege taking place there".*[47]

Although it took over half a century, in 1968, the Portland Field Research Group, led by Susann Palmer and Stuart Morris, took a considerable interest in the ruins, attempting to clear the site and surrounding pathways to encourage access to the church site and down to Church Ope Cove. In a letter to the Department of Environment from 1973, Morris describes the work to clear debris and vegetation from the site by the group at St Andrew's, and the ruins they revealed:

> *"Work proceeded very well in the first few years, and among other features the base of the detached bell-tower, steps, cills, etc have been unearthed. Our project has certainly been of immense local interest and we feel it is very important that the work is carried on to completion. Unfortunately the clearance work is proving a*

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[46] The Encyclopedia of Portland History - https://www.portlandhistory.co.uk/st-andrews-church.html

[47] Copy of a letter from John Pearce to the Southern Times (1909), documents with thanks to Stuart Morris.

far longer operation than we have anticipated, even with the keen band of our Members who have worked on the site on many occasions since 1968".[48]

As Morris's letter reveals, despite all their work, the scale of the work needed at St Andrew's Church ruins was considerable. Indeed, later in the 1970s, the ruins appear to have deteriorated rapidly, as a letter to the Department of Environment from 1976 reveals:

"I regret to inform you that there has been still further deterioration in the condition of these sites, and the remains on them […] the retaining wall supporting the St Andrews site - an essential part of the monument - is breaking up and stones falling onto the public footpath below […] In the circumstances my Group once again asks that your Department take over guardianship of this important feature, and initiate repair and consolidation work as a matter of urgency. Either these monuments are worth saving or they are not. It will be no consolation to our descendants to record that in the 1970s the site was abandoned to fate because no owner could be found to accept responsibility".[49]

From 1978 - 1982, Alan Hunt, from the Dorset Institute of Higher Education in Weymouth, led an excavation of St Andrew's Church in co-operation with the Portland Field Research Group, assisted by young adults from a Youth Training Scheme. Their purpose was not only to clear the undergrowth and rubble, but to investigate the archaeological evidence found during the clearance, and to consolidate the masonry of the ruins, including 'infilling of bomb crater'. There were also suggestions of producing a publication of archaeology and history of the church, and possible production of a 16mm film mooted by the Dorset Institute of Higher Education Film Unit.[50]

Alan Hunt's notes from the excavation suggest they uncovered a stone-lined wall by the northern entrance to the church. According to Hunt, the entrance pre-dated the church, which would suggest a pre-Christian/possibly Saxon site. Statues were found that were similar to ones discovered at Old Sarum, a Bronze Age hill fort in Salisbury. The ruins suggested a building which was not overly decorated, however, stone carvings of gargoyles and carved heads found inside (some of which are now in the Portland Museum collection), indicate more ornate decoration at some point. These included a carved stone depicting two hooked fish, which may have been a reference to St Andrew from the later history of the church. According to Alan Hunt, the roof would have been timber framed in the nave and chancel with simple stone vaulting in the south aisle. The interior would have been plastered, not rough stone, and possibly painted in colours that would seem gaudy today. Apparently, the original door to the church was to the north,

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[48] Stuart Morris, *Letter to the Department of Environment* (October 12th 1973), documents with thanks to Stuart Morris.

[49] Stuart Morris, *Letter to the Department of Environment* (May 27th 1976), documents with thanks to Stuart Morris.

[50] Alan Hunt, Portland, *Church of St. Andrew: Conservation and Preservation Scheme*, AMH/27.379. Documents with thanks to Stuart Morris.

and maps showing the track through Wakeham that lead down to the church (now obliterated), with some cottages around, would support this. The bodies buried within the church would have been jumbled up and placed under the slabs (some of which are still there) – not buried 6 feet under. Outside on the north side near the well, there were other burials close to the surface.[51]

Mark Godden, one of the students who took part in the excavation, remembers these findings well; and the later significance the ruins had for him, too. For the benefit of this project, he shared his experiences with researcher, Jill Proctor:

> *"I left school in 1980 at a time when unemployment was very high and quite a few of us boys from Tophill School found temporary work immediately on a YTS scheme that was just beginning at St Andrew's Church, Church Ope. I was lucky and found permanent employment within around three weeks of starting on the scheme, but my short time spent working at Church Ope still remains quite memorable.*
>
> *We all turned up on a Monday Morning, wearing new boots and donkey jackets provided by the government and were given shovels, mattocks and wheelbarrows. We were immediately set to work clearing the copious piles of rubble that at that time were piled within the body of the old church. Almost immediately, human remains started to turn up; literally, dozens of pieces of disarticulated bone and the occasional piece of skull. Surprisingly, I don't remember any of us boys being even slightly troubled by this.*
>
> *The work was overseen by Bournemouth University, and students and lecturers from Weymouth Teacher Training College were also heavily involved. I believe the person in charge was called Dr. Alan Hunt. I personally (under the strict supervision of a proper archaeologist) helped to excavate a whole burial to the north of the church which is now inaccessible and covered in trees and scrub. The body was female and I seem to remember that a wooden comb was found with her. The whole area to the immediate north of the church was chock full of burials. There were no coffin nails as most burials were in wool at the time. If you think about it, the churchyard at St. Andrew's received all of Portland's dead for at least seven or eight hundred years, so it is no wonder that the ground is full of bones and that plots were used and re-used many times.*
>
> *I remember that we also found copious amounts of thinly coloured window glass beneath the apertures which once contained windows. I also remember the then Rector of Portland paying a formal visit to the site and all evidence of human remains being well hidden for the duration of his visit. I believe that Bournemouth*

[51] Notes from Alan Hunt's excavations, and from Kit Berry's notes from her meeting with Alan Hunt.

University probably still hold some skeletons recovered back then. It would be incredibly interesting if some DNA based research could now be undertaken using these.

At the end of the YTS scheme (many months after I had left) the church walls had been stabilised and a huge amount of rubble and fallen masonry had been cleared. The whole site was tidy and clear of scrub, paths were remade, and hand rails were installed in some places. Sadly the whole site has now degenerated again.

I have subsequently found out that one of the few remaining standing headstones was erected to commemorate the burial of my x 7 grandmother and it is highly likely that some of the bones I handled, aged 16, were from direct ancestors which, in retrospect, is a bit spooky…".[52]

As Mark suggests, the graveyard at St Andrew's church has considerable significance for the people of Portland, with many of their ancestors likely buried at the site. Legend has it that the twins of Kind Ethelred, who were still-born, were buried in the graveyard, although no evidence of this has been found. During his trip to Portland in 1782, John Byng (later Viscount Torrington), described the ruinous state of the churchyard, with coffins and some skeletons exposed on the cliff due to the landslips, and gradually sliding down into the cove.[53] As part of her research for this project, Vicky Marshall explored the history of her family, the Pearces and Stones, both of whom have long connections to St Andrew's Church and Church Ope Cove. Indeed, the graveyard at St Andrew's Church still holds the gravestone to her ancestor, Edward Pearce (1691 - 1745). His headstone reads:

"In Memory of Edward Pearce
Superintendent to his Majesty Quarries in Portland
Who died the 12 Day of June 1745 Aged 58 years

I Never Did A Slander Forge
My Neighbours Fame to Wound
Nor Hearken to a False Report
By Malice Whispered Round."

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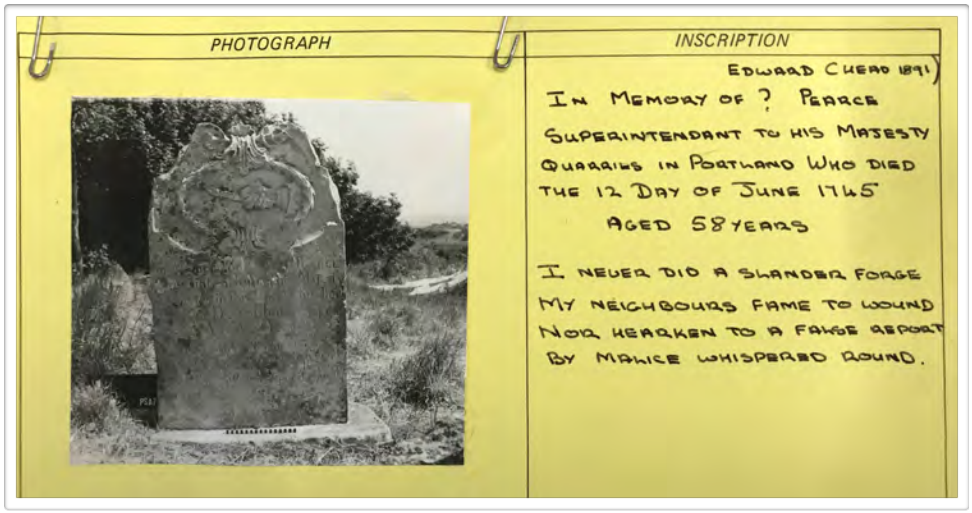
[52] Mark Godden, email to Jill Proctor (November, 2019).

[53] Clara King-Warry, *The High Place*, p. 7.



Edward Pearce was married to Mary Gilbert, and as well as working as a quarry manager, at one time owned one of the windmills on the Island. It is thought that a headstone near to his at St Andrew' Church may belong to his infant son, who was baptised on October 18th and died a few weeks later on November 9th 1712.[54]

Alongside Edward Pearce's gravestone, there are still a number of gravestones and tombstones at St Andrew's belonging to Portlanders who died in the 17th and 18th centuries, many of whose names are still common to families on Portland today. Those listed by J.Merrick Head during his excavations in the 1890s include:

- ?? Attwooll (d. August 11th, 1670)
- Abel Flew (d. October 25th, 1676)
- Agnes Attwooll (d. December 18th 1674)
- Robert Mitchell (d.May 9th 1680)
- Robert Pitt (d. January 20th 1690)
- Julan, wife of Robert Biett (d. May 2nd 1691) - possibly wife of Robert Pitt
- Mary Ferly (d. March 10th 1692)
- John Flew (d. August 15th 1698) and his wife Grace Flew (d. July 11th 1740)
- Elizabeth Gilbert (d. August 16th 1720)
- M.P (d. 1729)
- Robert Chiles (d. June 15th 1733)
- B.S. (d. 1741)
- John Stone (d. 1744)
- Henry Hellar
- Andrew Stone (d. July 30th 1764)
- M.M (1760)
- Lucretia Andrews, wife of William Andrews (d. April 5th 1710)
- Abell Pearce, son of Robert and Alese Pearce (d. July 25th 1737)

[54] Vicky Marshall, *Research Report for Church Ope Project* (November 2019)

- Susannah Comben, daughter of Silas and Elizabeth Comben (d. June 25th 1737)
- William Attwooll (d.1717)
- Sarah Flew (d. December 1729)
- Philip Durenth (d. 1713)
- John Ayles (d. June 3rd 1723)
- M.M. (1760)[55]

It's clear from the dates that local Portlanders were still being buried in the graveyard after the great Southwell landslip of 1734-5, and after the Church was officially abandoned in 1756. These graves suggest that burials continued right up until St George's Church was consecrated in 1764. They indicate, too, the significance the church possessed, despite its dereliction. Many of the gravestones and tombstones that survive today include elaborate carvings featuring common symbols used in the 18th century: crossbones, skulls, hour glasses, trumpets, and roses and thistles. One tombstone in particular, dedicated to Abel Flew, has given rise to the popular myth of the graveyard being a burial place for pirates, and to St Andrew's being commonly referred to as the 'pirates graveyard'. This myth is connected to the skull and crossbones carved into Flew's tombstone. However, there is no evidence that these graves have any connection to piracy, these symbols being common symbols of mortality and the *memento mori* of the period.[56] Indeed, many Portlanders are keen to dispel the myth as they feel it denigrates the resting place of their ancestors. As Vicky Marshall has said about the graveyard, and her own ancestral connection to the church:

> *"I believe that the ancient ruins of St. Andrew's church should be treated with respect and dignity because it is after all an ancient burial site. Is it right that the*

[55] J.Merrick Head, Isle of Portland in *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club*, ed. Morton G. Stuart (1891), p. 128-9.

[56] Photograph with thanks to Geoff Kirby.

local tourism board promotes stories of pirate graves here, when people should visit and gain some knowledge of its actual history […] That these are the graves of old Portlanders who lived by way of the island's ancient manners and customs, that surely do encompass stories of legend and myth".[57]

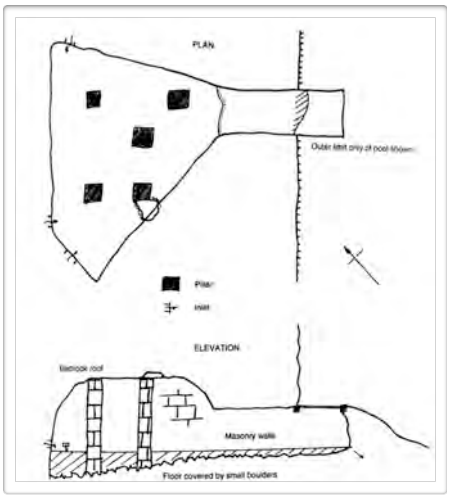
Today, much of the church ruins are very overgrown, despite being cleared by boys from the local borstal in 1992. Although the site continues to have considerable significance for many on Portland, the access paths to the church are not easy, and much of the north side of it is inaccessible. Despite this, many continue to visit, and indeed, it has been suggested by Geoff Kirby that in the early Millennium, a witches' coven was using the site for ritual ceremonies, although these activities have been disputed.[58]

[57] Vicky Marshall, *Research report for The History, Myths and Legends of Church Ope Cove*, November 2019.

[58] http://www.geoffkirby.co.uk/Portland/695710/

St Andrew's Well

Research by Jill Proctor



[Map of St Andrew's Well from The Caves of the Isle of Portland. Photograph courtesy of Geoff Kirby]

Underneath Rufus Castle and to the north-east of St Andrew's Church, is a well, the origins of which, have mystified many generations of Portlanders. It is unknown whether it is a natural cave, an artificial grotto, or cistern. The well taps into a small spring, of which there are a number at Church Ope Cove, and may have been an early water supply for Rufus Castle or Pennsylvania Castle. The entrance is at the base of a low cliff and has a short passage leading to a triangular chamber. The chamber consists of walls of ashlar masonry and a roof of bedrock supported by five masonry columns made of rough hewn stone. There are three holes in the walls to admit water.[59] The water supply has apparently been used by generations of Portlanders at Church Ope Cove, including quarrymen and cafe owners on the beach who sourced water for tea from the well.

[59] Mike O'Connor and Nigel Graham, *The Caves of the Isle of Portland*, p.17 and p. 85.

The History of Quarrying at Church Ope Cove

Research by Stella New

There is significant evidence that Portland Stone from around Church Ope Cove has been quarried and used since the Iron Age; the Romans considering the stone of considerable building value from as early as the 1st century AD.[60] At this time, Portland Stone would have been exposed by the forces of nature, the cliffs broken off, and pushed down to the foreshore. From there, it would have been loaded onto rafts or barges and likely transported to Radipole, where Weymouth is today.[61] On Portland itself, there is also evidence that Portland Stone was used for the construction of coffins and stone-lined burials. Although no quarrymen's tools have been found on the Island, some found at the Roman Fort of Vindolanda in Northumberland are likely very similar in style to those tools used on Portland at the time; a style which remained virtually unchanged for centuries. Quarry marks on the stone used by the Romans continued almost unchanged until the 1950s. It is likely that the quarrying and masonry skills learned from the Romans were passed down and formed the basis of the Portland Stone industry in later years.[62]

Portland Stone was highly valued throughout the Saxon period and by the early Norman kings. Indeed, by the 12th century, although there are few records of Portland Stone being used further afield, it was prized enough to be used in the church at Manaccan in Cornwall and in a tower at Exeter Cathedral between 1150 and 1170.[63] During the 13th century, stone continued to be used for buildings on the Island, including the "Vicar's House" in Wakeham that was destroyed in the Civil War.[64] The locals would have continued to use the local stone to build their houses in Wakeham and further afield on the Island. There are few records as to how quarrying was organised and managed on Portland, but it is likely this would have been through the Court Leet's administration, which dated back to Saxon times.[65]

While quarrying, (particularly on the east coast of Portland around Church Ope Cove) was a flourishing industry in the Medieval period, the 14th century led to a period of difficulty. Famine in the early years of the century was followed by outbreaks of plague from 1347 – 1375, and, by 1377, Portland had lost nearly half its population. In addition, hostilities with

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[60] T Hughes, G K Lott, M J Poultney, & B J Cooper, *Portland Stone: A Nomination for Global Heritage Stone Resource*, Vol 36 No 3 (September 2013)

[61] Stuart Morris, *Portland, An Illustrated History*, p11

[62] Gilliam Hackman, *Stone to build London* (2014), p12

[63] Ibid, p15

[64] Morris, *Portland, An Illustrated History,* p18

[65] Hackman, *Stone to build London*, p16

the French had a negative affect on trade. Quarrying and shipping the stone was a skilled operation, and depopulation following the Black Death meant that men were needed to work the farms, maintain the defences, and work on the reconstruction of Rufus Castle.[66] However, despite these difficulties, a considerable amount of stone was exported from the Island at this time:

- In 1303: a barge load of Portland Stone was used at Exeter Cathedral (mainly for pillar bases and capitals). By the mid-fourteenth century, records of the use of Portland Stone in London start to appear.
- In 1347: used at Westminster.
- In 1349: used for the foundations of a postern, or gateway at the Tower of London.
- In 1350: an inventory of the stores at London Bridge included 690 feet (about 43 tons) of Portland Stone, handworked and squared, and 1044 feet (about 65 tons) not worked – the total being 1734 pieces, value 5d per piece, £36 3s 11d.
- In 1353: 250 feet (about 16 tons) of Portland Stone purchased for use at Rotherhithe – maybe used for King Edward III's manor.
- In 1354-1355: stone bought for the Tower wharf from Walter Bele, probably a London dealer.
- In 1381-1382: the accounts of London Bridge included "Item paid for 42 feet (about 2.5 tons) of Portland Stone, bought at 6d/foot, 21s.
- At about the same time (Christmas 1379) stone purchased for the Royal Castle at Southampton.[67]

It is likely that the quarries that provided the stone at this time were the quarries on the east of the Island at East & Penn Weares. Hostilities with France continued on and off throughout the 15th century and the Wars of the Roses caused much disruption in the capital. As a result, there is no record of new building with Portland Stone in London. However, this may also have been because the Manor of Portland changed hands several times during the century and did not come back to ownership by the Crown until 1461, under Edward IV. The frequent changes of ownership and absentee landlords probably made consistent management of works and finances difficult.[68]

Queen Elizabeth I provided leases for quarries on the Island, but there seems to have been little stone exported during her reign, although this may have been due to the difficulty in transporting the stone despite the proximity of the quarries to the shore.[69] A Muster Roll of 1542 lists the names of several families who became recognised in later years as quarrying families - Atwool, Lano, Benfyld, Pearce, and Flew. Although, at that

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[66] Morris, *Portland, An Illustrated History,* p21

[67] Hackman, Stone to build London p 20

[68] Ibid, p.22

[69] Douglas Knoop & G. P. Jones, 'The English Medieval Quarry' in *The Economic History Review* (1938), p. 23

time, quarrying was of increasing importance, agriculture was still an important occupation on the Island.[70]

The most famous period of Portland Stone history was in the 17th century, when Sir Christopher Wren and his associates used Portland Stone extensively in the rebuilding of London after 'The Great Fire' of 1666. However, in the early 17th century, Portland Stone was already in high demand. Although Wren is synonymous with the use of Portland Stone, it was Inigo Jones who preceded him as the Royal Surveyor and who first championed its use in the rebuilding of the Banqueting Hall in 1619, and for repairs to the original St Paul's Cathedral. In 1608, a rental survey mentions only one quarry on Portland, presumably the same quarry mentioned in a lease from Queen Elizabeth I in 1591 and specified by William Pitt in a survey of 1594. While actual location of this quarry is not specified, it is likely to be on the north east coast where the King's Quarries are marked in later maps.[71]

Records show that between 1616 - 1618, Inigo Jones used 230 tons of Portland stone for The Queen's House at Greenwich, (likely from the quarry near King's Pier).[72] Building accounts from 1619 - 1622, record that the stone for the Banqueting Hall was taken from the quarry on the north east of the Island, and also that the Crown paid for a stone pier, a crane for loading ships, a store house, and a new cart-way to assist with the transporting of the stone to London.[73] Sadly, the pier was destroyed in the 1665 landslip.[74] Not all stone from the Island was going to London at this time. For example, stone dated 1632 is present in Winchester Cathedral.[75]

The traveller and diarist, Peter Mundy, visited Portland shortly before the Civil War, and described the quarrying in some detail, giving us an idea of how these quarries may have looked at the time:

> *"There I went to the hewers of stone, which was quarried for the reparation of St Paules Church in London. There were about 200 workemen, some hewing out of the cliffe aloft, some carryeing down, others ladeinge (loading). Some stones there were, ready squared and formed, of 9, 10, & 11 tone weight as they said; some of them ready squared aloft and sent downe in carts made of purpose. Other rough*

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[70] Hackman, *Stone to build London*, p 27

[71] Ibid, p.40

[72] Ibid, p.32

[73] Ibid, p. 41

[74] Ibid, p. 42

[75] Ibid, p40

pieces as they were hewn out of the rocke, were tumbled down to bee squared belowe".[76]

The quarry he is describing is of considerable size, but as 200 men would include nearly the whole male population of Portland at the time, this is likely an exaggeration. He also describes the carts as having solid wooden wheels and being drawn by 8 horses – similar carts were used right up until the 1880s. The outbreak of the Civil War meant that stone output came to a virtual standstill, not only because the demand for stone for London reduced drastically, but there was also considerable fighting on Portland, such as the attempts to hold the Island for the Crown.[77] In 1665, Charles II recognised Portlanders' contribution to the Royalist cause in the Civil War. From ancient custom, Portlanders were entitled to half the duty of 12d, which was charged on every ton of stone that left the Island. The only exception to this was stone specifically for the King's use. Portlanders also had the right to open any quarry on the common land and take stone for their own benefit. Charles II raised Portlanders' entitlement to 9d per ton. Money from this Stone Grant has provided benefits for the population right up until the 21st century.[78]

After the massive destruction wrought by the Great Fire of London in 1666, Sir Christopher Wren was chosen as the architect to rebuild St Paul's Cathedral and chose Portland Stone for the job. Work began on Portland to clear overburden, split the stone with picks and wedges, square blocks up and take them down to the quay. The stone benefitted from being left to harden before being shaped in London. The first stone was delivered to the site at St Paul's in 1676 but it was obvious that the enormous quantity of stone required for the job would require special measures to be taken. At Wren's request, the king granted permission for stone to be taken not only from the royal quarries, but those belonging to the commons. The Portlanders were up in arms at this, as it was the largest stone order in history with potential to destroy large areas of arable land on the Island. This set the tone for many of the quarrymen's dealings with Wren over the next few years.[79]

One has a certain sympathy with the Portlanders. Many of them would never have travelled further than Weymouth, if that, and to be cheated of what they regarded as theirs, to fund a building of which they could have no true conception, in a place they had never seen and couldn't possibly imagine, must have seemed outrageous. Things became more difficult when Thomas Knight – who had not been born on Portland – was given full charge of production. The Crown bore the cost of rebuilding the pier destroyed in the 1665 landslip and providing better roads and lifting equipment. However, Knight was not good at his job, and antagonised the local quarrymen, who were used to being independent and not accustomed to having to take orders from anyone they regarded as

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[76] Ibid, p40

[77] Ibid, p. 38

[78] Morris, *Portland, An Illustrated History*, p 33

[79] Ibid, p.34

a ‘middle man’. Knight’s behaviour triggered riots, during which the quarrymen damaged cranes and piers, tools and carts, and prevented any stone from being cut. Consequently, all work on St Paul’s stopped. Some of the leading quarrymen (including Edward Pearce of Southwell, and Edward Pearce of Easton) were summoned to London to stand before the King and answer for the disruption. They promised to ‘behave themselves’, and work began again, though they were still less than happy.[80]

As work continued over several years, the quarrymen still felt they were being exploited. Their right to dig stone from the commons, well-documented for over 100 years, was threatened. Further problems arose in 1696, when another landslip destroyed the piers, cranes and roads. Work stopped on St Paul’s, and the quarrymen, facing unemployment, began selling stone to an agent in Weymouth. Wren intervened and persuaded the men back to work repairing the roads and piers, and shipment of stone to London resumed in 1698. Things rubbed along for several years until problems arose once more in 1702 when Wren tried to prevent the Islanders from using any stone at all, saying it all had to go to St Paul’s. This flouting of rights, possessed by Islanders from ‘time beyond the memory of man’ was recognised by the Crown Steward, who pointed out that the working methods were under the control of the Court Leet, not Wren. Despite all the problems, Portland produced around 6 million tons of stone for the City of London.[81]

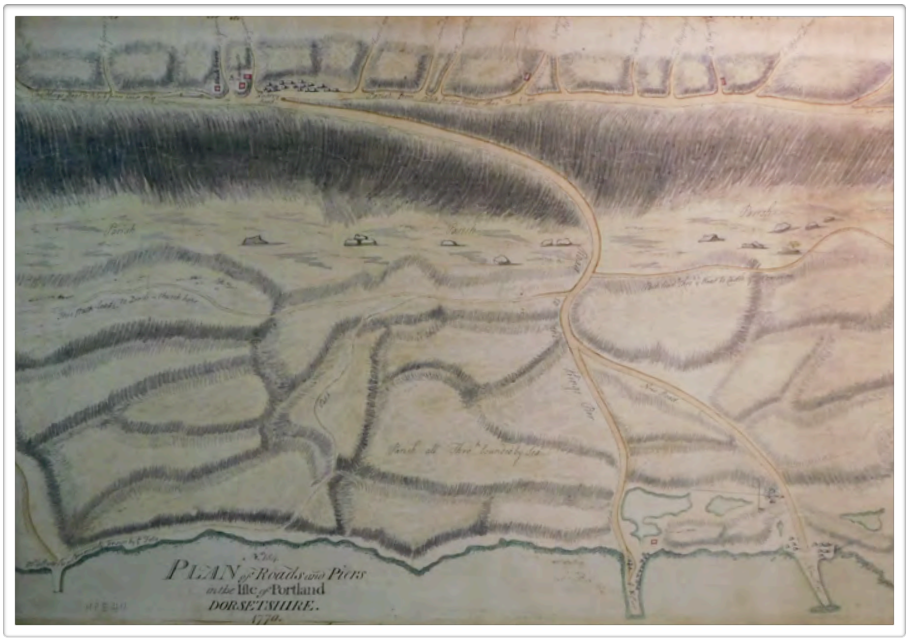
The use of Portland stone continued to grow through the 18th century. However, as the older quarries to the north of Church Ope Cove began to exhaust, more quarries began to open to the northwest and centre of the Island. A map from 1710 shows quarries only to the east, but Thomas Roper’s map of 1745 (above), shows many more, including several

[80] Ibid, p.34

[81] Ibid, pp. 35-36

quarried out. He also notes that Folly Pier, (which he calls Old Pier) located between King's Pier and Durdle Pier was, "At present useless, being destroyed by the sea".[82]

In 1756, John Smeaton, designer and builder of the Eddystone Lighthouse, visited the Island to choose the stone for his project. He noted that whilst the traditional tools of hammer, wedges and kivel (a tool which featured both a hammer and an axe) were still in use, one significant change that had occurred at some point in the last 150 years, was the use of gunpowder to blast off the hard cap layer of stone which needed to be removed before the good quality building stone could be accessed. This may have originated from the arrival of cannon and gunpowder on the Island for defence against the French, and during the Civil War.[83]



The increase in demand for the stone, and the reduced amounts of stone produced in the Church Ope area, resulted in the quarries moving to the middle of the island. By 1824, when 27,000 tons of stone were exported from Portland, it was becoming obvious to all concerned that a safer way of taking the stone from the top of the Island, to a point where it could be safely loaded onto sailing vessels, was desperately needed. It was decided by the quarry owners and stone merchants that a tramway or railway was required. Plans were drawn up by the Portland Railway Company for a railway starting at Priory Corner, rounding the base of the Verne earthworks, and travelling down via an inclined plane to the quayside close to Portland Castle. Stone was brought by cart from the quarries to Priory Corner, loaded onto wagons, and sent down to Castletown by means of a gravity incline, with the weight of the stone counteracted by empty wagons travelling upwards from the bottom. The railway opened in October 1826, and subsequently, quarry owners

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[82] Thomas Roper, *Map of Portland* (1745), National Archives (Ref: MPE 1/356); Plan of the Roads and Piers (1770), National Archive (MPE 1/411)

[83] Hackman, *Stone to build London*, pp. 83-84

laid private railways to Priory Corner from their own quarries. The railway had a number of problems over the years but continued to function right through until World War II.[84]

Church Ope was obviously a much quieter place during this time, but a plan by the Easton & Church Hope Railway Co. in 1867 looked likely to change that. The company planned a railway from Sheepcroft, north of Easton, to finish just past Perryfields Corner. From here, a headshunt would give access to a cable operated incline down to a new pier at Church Ope Cove. Unfortunately, the plan never came to fruition; it seemed that people preferred to continue using the pre-established Merchant's Railway and it's sheltered harbour, rather than risk the exposed pier at Church Ope. After 16 years and only 6 furlongs of railway constructed, the only future left for the company was to join the Weymouth & Portland Railway. Although their line did eventually run quite close to Church

Ope, the pier was never built.[85]

As the 19th Century progressed, Church Ope would have become a very different place from the bustling chaotic stone factory of the previous 300 years or more, but quarrying still had a part to play in the life of the cove.[86] As quarrying continued apace on the Island, there was an increasing amount of overburden (stone from the surface which had no value as building stone) to be disposed of. Between 1849 and 1872, almost 6,000,000 tons of stone was provided for the Breakwater alone. Some concept of the sheer quantity of this can be obtained by looking at Nicodemus' Knob, a stone pillar near the Grove, some 30 feet high, which was left standing by the quarrymen as they removed the stone. It is thought that it was left to indicate the original ground level.[87] Further quarries were opened on the southeast of the Island in 1904 and enormous loads of overburden were tipped over the area between Southwell and Church Ope, much to the aggravation of the

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[84] Brian Jackson, *Isle of Portland Railways Vol I*, (1999) pp. 15-20

[85] Brian Jackson, *Isle of Portland Railways Vol II* (2000), pp. 45 – 49

[86] Photographs of crane on Church Ope cliffs, and a traction engine at work at Church Ope steps, http://www.geoffkirby.co.uk/PortlandArchivePictures/html/stone.html

[87] Ashley Smith, *The Encyclopaedia of Portland History* (2014) https://www.portlandhistory.co.uk/nicodemus-knob.html. Accessed 29 Nov 2019

fishermen whose fishing grounds were being destroyed. A long legal battle eventually resulted in a High Court Judge ruling against the stone firms. No further tipping was allowed, but that which had already been tipped was gradually carried by the current into Church Ope Cove, altering the shape of the bay forever and covering the sand in pebbles. This subsequently had the advantage of allowing paddle steamers to land at the cove, which began its transition from a working quarry site into a beautiful, peaceful destination for tourists and locals alike.[88]

[88] Morris, *Portland: An Illustrated History*, p.125

Pennsylvania Castle

Research by Tony Carbis

XV. Pennsylvania Castle

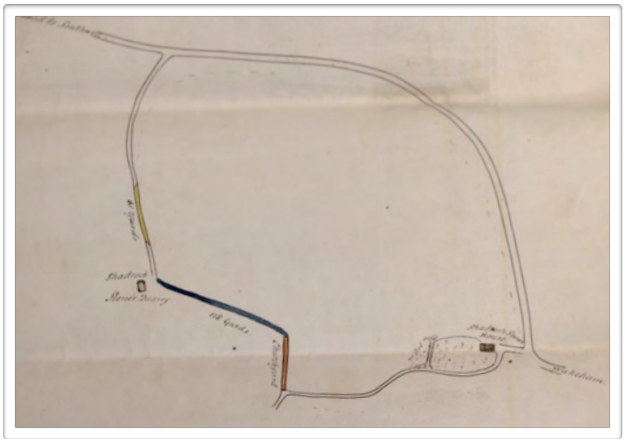
In its elevated position looking out over the bay, Pennsylvania Castle is one of the iconic landmarks of Church Ope Cove. Its history is vitally intertwined with the legacy of John Penn, who first built the castle in the late 18th century, and as such, it has long represented an elite perspective of Church Ope Cove. However, the castle's history also indicates the importance of looking at the history of ordinary Portlanders living at Church Ope and in Wakeham, whose lives were profoundly impacted by John Penn and his ambitious vision for the castle.

Pennsylvania Castle was built between 1797 and 1800 by John Penn, grandson of William Penn, the founder of the province of Pennsylvania. Constructed in Portland Stone, the castle is built in a gothic style, designed by James Wyatt, the architect to George III. At the time, Gothic architecture was having a revival due to an interest in medieval art, and championed by public figures such as the Prime Minister, Horace Walpole, from his mansion at Strawberry Hill. The form also reflected a shift in literary style towards the Gothic, with the novel, 'The Castle of Otranto' becoming a popular classic at the time.

John Penn was gifted the land at Church Ope by King George III, and his daughter Princess Elizabeth opened the castle in 1800. George III is known to have often visited Weymouth and Portland for sea bathing. At the time, bathing in the sea was popular amongst the aristocracy and monarchy, particularly with George III, which might well have been one of the reasons for John Penn's decision to build a large bath in the grounds

outside the castle leading to Church Ope Cove.[89] Penn's butler was instructed to fill the bath with buckets of water from the cove. The large, oval-shaped stone bath was installed on common land, which led the Court Leet to insist that Penn pay half a crown a year as an encroachment fee.[90] He refused to pay, and the bath was abandoned, having only been used on a few occasions.[91]

John Penn's attitude to common land, as shown by his building of the bath down at Church Ope Cove, is apparent in many of the dealings he had with Portlanders during his lifetime. While the building of the castle undoubtedly brought considerable work and income for local people, many became increasingly upset by Penn and attempted to rebel against him. One key figure in the history of John Penn and Pennsylvania Castle is Shadrach Stone (1766 - 1846), a local quarry owner from near the edge of Church Ope Cove. In March 1808, Penn decided it was necessary to block a pathway known as 'the Maypoles', to enhance his access to Pennsylvania Castle. However, the result was to prevent Shadrach Stone's access from his own house to that of his quarry. Indeed, Penn also wished to demolish Stone's own home, Ivy Cottage, which was in the way of his proposed entrance gate to the new castle.[92]



Nothing is recorded of Shadrach Stone's reaction to Penn's actions, but it is clear that John Penn eventually got his way, giving Stone 'Girt House' in Wakeham, in exchange for

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[89] Photograph of Penn's Bath with thanks to Geoff Kirby - http://www.geoffkirby.co.uk/Portland/695710/

[90] *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club*

[91] Ashley Smith, *The Encyclopaedia of Portland History* (2014) - https://www.portlandhistory.co.uk/pennsylvania-castle.html

[92] *Maps showing the proposed diversion of the pathways by John Penn and the location of Shadrach Stones property*, Dorset History Centre (Q.A.H.3.30 and Q.A.H.3.34).

his own home, which was demolished. As the Dorset Quarter Sessions Book (1809) states:

> *"Ivy cottage that stood within the imitation-Tudor entrance gate-way of the castle, Penn had converted into a castellated lodge and lit it with a number of very narrow lancet windows. Penn also castellated a Jacobean cottage and converted it into a billiard room. It was some distance from the house and, like Ivy Cottage, fell into disrepair. Other cottages he obtained and utilised for his outdoor servants; others were turned into stables".*[93]

Girt House was one of the finest houses in Wakeham at this time, and where Penn himself had stayed while the castle was being built. The tithe apportionment map of 1841 shows that Stone owned various plots of arable and pasture land, as well as tithe plot 1217a, Girt House and garden. He lived there with: his wife, Ann; son, John; daughter, Rebecca; brother and sister-in-law, Edward and Rebecca Stone; brother, John; and another 11 year old, John Stone. However, Shadrach Stone's descendants were unable to maintain the upkeep of the house, despite converting it to an inn, and the building gradually fell into dilapidation.[94]

At the same time as his demolition of Stone's house and pathways, Penn also diverted the old road to Southwell and laid a new one, which many Portlanders refused to recognise for years. He also extended his land to include the ruins of Rufus Castle and St Andrew's Church. He enclosed both, adding an arched entrance to the church, along with 'rearrangements' of the remaining stone work to make the ruins more 'appealing', and the aforementioned arched bridge into Rufus Castle for his carriages. By enclosing the land, he removed the ancient rights of way through his grounds to the ruined church of St. Andrew and its graveyard, which was a source of irritation and litigation for many Portlanders seeking access to their ancestral parish.

[93] *Dorset England Quarter Session Order Books*

[94] *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club Vol. 37* - Biodiversity Online)

These activities had a considerable impact on local Portlanders and were not taken lying down. According to a short report in the Hampshire Chronicle of December 14th 1829, Governor Penn received a letter purporting to have been written by one of four reduced tradesmen who had arrived at Portland and wished to emigrate to the Swan River.[95] It was stated in the letter that the said men had insufficient funds to allow them to emigrate. It further stated that they had been watching Penn's movements for some time, along with the threat that he would never leave Portland alive if he failed to leave the sum of fifty pounds on a seat in the grounds of Pennsylvania Castle at a particular time. This having had no effect, a copy of the letter was later found inside the castle. A meeting of local residents was held and a hundred pounds reward was offered to anyone with information leading to the apprehension and conviction of the offenders. The report ended by stating that a female had been taken up on suspicion of having written the letters.

After Penn's death in 1834, it became local legend that his ghost could be seen wandering the grounds of Pennsylvania Castle, gazing intently out to sea and dressed in the knee breeches, shirt frills, and silver buckles of the time. This legend says much about local attitudes to Penn and his legacy at Church Ope Cove. He undoubtedly had a profound impact on the landscape and history of the cove, but his ambition was not always felt positively by local people.

In 1835, the castle was bequeathed to Penn's sister, Mrs Stuart, and was let out to Mr Thomas Heath from the 1840s as his summer residence. In 1863, it was listed for sale for £8,000, and owned by Mr Granville, nephew of John Penn, who owned it until his death in 1867. In 1887, the property was sold to Mr John Merrick Head, a retired solicitor from Reigate, who extended the castle and became fascinated by its history and the history of St Andrew's Church ruins below it. The auction records at its sale in 1916, written by Mr Head's widow, suggest the historic interest in the castle at that time:

> *"An auction sale of unusual interest took place at Messrs. Henry Duke & Son's property sale-room on Wednesday afternoon, when Mr. E. B. Duke offered for sale by auction, by the instructions of Mrs. Merrick Head, Pennsylvania Castle, Portland, the picturesque castellated residence built on the bluff, overlooking Church Ope Cove […] The late Mr. Merrick Head, who purchased Pennsylvania nearly 30 years ago, took the interest of an archaeologist and connoisseur in the place, and laid out large sums in making the castle well-equipped, comfortable modern residence. He showed a just pride in the historical and literary associations of the estate, in its choice amenities, and in the rare collections gathered in the house".*[96][97]

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[95] Hampshire Chronicle (December 14th, 1829)

[96] Western Gazette, (Friday 23 June 1916)

[97] Dorset History Centre (D.2648.PTD.13).

In 1950, the house was bought by Mr and Mrs Legg, who turned it into a hotel and holiday park known as ‘Pennsylvania Castle Hotel’, advertising itself as a “fully licensed free house”, with a “comfortable and well-appointed hotel”, and “spacious restaurant”. The Chalet Park was, “situated in a secluded position overlooking the sea and Church ope Cove where safe bathing may be enjoyed […] All are two-roomed, four-berth; fitted with one cochette, convertible to a double bed, and a double bunk bed. There is a camp shop in the grounds”.[98] It was turned back into a private residence in 1994 by the new owner, John Hanna, the owner of the British retail brand ‘New Look’. John Hanna subsequently sold the building to Stephen Curtis, a solicitor with business interests in Russia. Curtis was killed in a helicopter crash in 2004 and Pennsylvania Castle was sold by his widow, Sarah Curtis, to a buyer from Australia. After a brief spell as a private home, the castle was made available as a holiday home, also catering for weddings, private and corporate functions, and other events. The castle was used as the location for the film, 'Happy New Year, Colin Burstead’, directed by Ben Wheatley, which was first broadcast by the BBC in December 2018.[99]

[98] *Isle of Portland Official Guide* (1957), Dorset History Centre, p. 47

[99] Ashley Smith, *The Encyclopaedia of Portland History* (2014) - https://www.portlandhistory.co.uk/pennsylvania-castle.html

History of Smuggling at Church Ope Cove

The history of smuggling in England goes hand in hand with the history of customs taxation. In Saxon England, King Ethelred II was the first to impose a toll charge, or import duty, on boatloads of foreign wine arriving at Billingsgate. This became the 'custom', for foreign vintners to give up a portion of their cargoes for permission to trade. However, these tolls only applied to certain ports, so evasion was often easy. The verb 'to smuggle' itself dates from this period. It comes from the Danish word *smugle,* which literally means 'smuggle', and the Swedish *smuga* means 'a lurking hole' - the Anglo-Saxon *smugan*, 'to creep', is probably cognate with the Icelandic prefix *smug* which stems from *smjuga*, and means "to creep" or 'to creep through a hole'.[100]

While illegal smuggling activities had occurred for centuries, in the late 17th, 18th and 19th centuries in England, these activities exploded to astonishing proportions, particularly in the coastal areas of Kent, Cornwall, and Dorset. This increase was largely due to the high levels of customs taxes imposed by a succession of governments to pay for costly wars in Europe and America. Luxury goods in particular, became far more expensive, with these customs duties being widely resented across society. This is illustrated by the economist and advocate of free trade, Adam Smith, who described a smuggler as "a person who, though no doubt blameable for violating the laws of his country, is frequently incapable of violating those of natural justice, and would have been in every respect an excellent citizen had not the laws of his country made that a crime which nature never meant to be so".[101] With Smith's argument for the benefits of free trade, smuggling would cease with the reduction of import and export duties on goods.

The types of goods illegally brought into Britain changed considerably over the centuries, primarily due to changes in taxation, but also due to popular demand for certain products. Brandy and wine made up a considerable percentage of contraband cargoes smuggled into Dorset in the 18th century. Other goods included rum, coffee, tea, salt, pepper, cocoa beans, vinegar, cotton, silk & lace, tobacco, playing cards, and logwood. Customs records show that in 1764, nearly 7 million pounds of tea was being smuggled in annually.[102] In 1814, a Mrs Moore and Thomas Creed were arrested in Weymouth for the smuggling of silks and lace, "some of which were found concealed about the person of Mrs Moore, who was in the after of quitting the house".[103] This couple were apparently part of a common smuggling trade of luxury fabrics, "for the purpose of disposing them

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[100] https://www.burtonbradstock.org.uk/History/Smuggling/Smuggling.htm

[101] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations Vol II* (1776), p. 520.

[102] https://www.burtonbradstock.org.uk/History/Smuggling/Smuggling.htm

[103] Roger Guttridge, *Dorset Smugglers* (1986), p. 86

off to several families that may visit this place during the Summer".[104] Their illegal stock was catering to a booming population of middle-class visitors coming to the Dorset coast, with locals and customers of all classes largely turning a blind-eye and allowing these businesses to continue. Smuggling itself involved people from all classes, professions, genders and ages. From farm labourers who helped transport goods inland, to local clergy who bought discounted tea and wine, and wealthy merchants who obtained cheaper silks and lace. Even wealthy local landowners supplied money for smuggling operations in exchange for a percentage of the profits. Women were also often involved in smuggling in Dorset, carrying spirits in 'bladders' under their petticoats, as well as a needle to prick the bladder if they were chased.

Many smugglers were seafaring men, fishermen and sailors, who found a use for their knowledge of navigation and sailing, with greater financial reward. Famous Dorset smugglers like Jack Rattenbury, started life as fishermen but later saw opportunities in smuggling, joining a privateer and later working as a pilot at the same time as bringing in large quantities of contraband. Our knowledge of him comes from his extraordinary book, *Memoirs of a Smuggler*, compiled from his diary and journal, which was first published in 1837.[105] Inland smuggling was often carried out by labourers to supplement their low wages, acting as 'tub-carriers' and 'batsmen' (local thugs). While a week's work in the field might pay approximately 7 or 8 shillings, a successful night of smuggling cargo could bring in over 5 shillings for one night, making it a worthwhile pursuit for the low-waged.[106]

In the early 18th century, contraband goods were largely collected from sailing vessels moored at sea and rowed inland. However, in the 18th century, as the government tried to clamp down on smuggling, they brought in a series of acts to limit these activities. In 1719, they passed the first *Hovering Act*, which made it illegal for vessels to stay within six miles of the coast. This made it far more difficult to wait to bring goods ashore, and led to smugglers increasingly finding places to hide goods quickly among rocks, hedges and ditches, and in coastal cottages.[107] Some smugglers were even known to use caves for short-term storage. A popular method was known as 'sowing the crop', where casks of wine and spirits were dumped at sea to collect later. These were attached to bags of shingle to allow them to sink, and fixed to a bag of feathers, which floated on the surface in order to locate them later. Frank Perkins writes of smugglers at Pitts Deep in Hampshire using this technique in his book on the town of Boldre:

> "*The kegs of spirits, roped together, were sunk and marked with a float, about one quarter of a mile from the shore, in the Pitts Deep stream, at a spot known as*

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[104] Ibid, p. 86

[105] Jack Rattenbury, *Memoirs of a Smuggler* (1837)

[106] https://www.burtonbradstock.org.uk/History/Smuggling/Smuggling.htm

[107] Ibid.

Brandy Hole. The kegs were floated ashore by punts, as by this way it was easier to sink them if a coastguard arrived. The kegs were carried from the shore by a gang of local men to carts which were waiting a short distance away, but if dangerous for the carts to load up, the kegs were easily slung across the shoulders, generally one in front and two behind. The pay was 2/ 6d. per keg".[108]

In the mid-18th century, the British government ramped up their attempts to limit smuggling, both through legislation to discourage smugglers, and by cutting customs taxes on goods such as tea. In 1736, Parliament introduced the death penalty for injuring customs officials. However, this had little effect on the rate of smuggling at the time, largely because of the limited defences on the coast, as men who had guarded ports and coastal entry points were drawn to fight in the wars with America and France.[109] However, in the early 19th century, after the Napoleonic War, the government again put considerable efforts into limiting smuggling, this time having more success. They developed a new preventative force along the southwest coast, but also fought the popularity of smuggling with propaganda against smugglers themselves. Popular cartoonists and pamphleteers denounced smugglers as funding the French enemy, and many in society became less supportive of smuggling. This propaganda had a significant effect, however, at the same time, following Napoleon's defeat at the battle of Waterloo, many British sailors returned to civilian life and found few jobs to sustain them. As a Lords Commission to the Treasury predicted, this led to many ex-naval sailors taking up smuggling activities:

"after so long a period of war in every part of Europe, many of the most daring professional men, discharged from their occupation and averse to the daily labour of agricultural or mechanical employment, will be the ready instruments of those desperate persons who have a little capital, and are hardy enough to engage in this [smuggling] traffic".[110]

Despite the increase in numbers involved in smuggling, immediately following the defeat of Napoleon, the government's efforts began to bear fruit, and smuggling became increasingly difficult. In 1809, a new 'Preventative Waterguard' was established, which had better ships and was better paid than previous forces, meaning they were potentially less likely to take bribes.[111] These men were also well organised and were given strict instructions on their role and expectations:

"General Instructions: All officers and Persons employed in the Coast Guard, are to bear in mind that the sole object of their appointment is the Protection of the

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[108] Frank Perkins quoted in https://www.burtonbradstock.org.uk/History/Smuggling/Smuggling.htm

[109] Richard Platt, *Smuggling in the British Isles: A History*, p. 128.

[110] https://www.burtonbradstock.org.uk/History/Smuggling/Smuggling.htm

[111] Richard Platt, *Smuggling in the British Isles*, pp. 136-7.

Revenue: and that their utmost endeavours are therefore to be used to prevent the landing of uncustomed goods, and to seize all persons, vessels, boats, cattle, and carriages, in any way employed in Smuggling and all goods liable to be forfeited by law.

Every Person in the Coast Guard is to consider it his first and most important object to secure the person of the Smuggler; and the reward granted for each smuggler convicted, or the share of the penalty recovered from him, will be paid (on the Certificate of the Inspecting Commander) to the person or persons by whom the smuggler is absolutely taken and secured, and not to the crew in general.

Every Officer and Person employed in the Coast Guard is hereby strictly charged not to do, consent to, abet, or conceal any act or thing wherein or".[112]

In 1811, the Preventative Waterguard created a 'coastal blockade' between North and South Foreland, on the east coast of Kent, with a force of land patrols stationed in watch towers a few miles apart. They also established a new 'Coast Guard' in 1822, who covered areas of coastline not covered by the blockade. With these two forces, smuggling was increasingly driven underground, and with the adoption of more free trade policies in the 1840s, and less import duties, by the mid-19th century, large scale smuggling was increasingly a thing of the past.

So what do we know about smuggling activities on Portland? And crucially, at Church Ope Cove. Local author and historian Stuart Morris identified a clear example of smugglers caught in the act at Church Ope Cove. In his book, 'Portland *An Illustrated History',* Morris describes a fight which broke out between smugglers and customs officers in January 1826:

"Captain Boxer and his 'gaberty men' discovered 37 casks of spirits which had been sunk off Church Ope. The smugglers made a '... most daring attack on the boatmen with stones and weapons, inflicting serious injuries'. [113]

As a result of this skirmish, one captured smuggler, Isaac Rod of Portland, was tried at Dorchester and sentenced to death for wounding a customs officer. According to Morris, '.. such was public sympathy..' that the sentence was reduced to two years hard labour instead.[114]

Court Rolls from the early 19th century list a high number of Portlanders being prosecuted for smuggling offences. These prosecutions include both men and women of

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[112] Opening page of instructions to the Coastguard, 1829. Source: HMSO, quoted https://www.burtonbradstock.org.uk/History/Smuggling/Smuggling.htm

[113] Stuart Morris, Portland *An Illustrated History* (Dovecote Press, 2016, p.60

[114] Ibid

all ages, mainly listed as having professions as fishermen and quarrymen. However, they do not indicate which part of the Island they lived or carried out their activities. The court rolls do indicate an increase in prosecutions for smuggling offences around the 1820s, which could suggest a higher involvement in smuggling around that time. However, it could equally indicate the increased crackdown on these activities at the time.

Many of the references to specific smuggling locations on Portland refer to the area around Chesil Beach, rather than Church Ope. In 1815, the prevention officer at Abbotsbury, Benjamin Brown, stated that, "the mode of smuggling carried on in his district by means of sinking small casks of spirits in the Fleet or the backwater, getting them up as opportunity offers" suggesting that goods were coming in via Chesil Beach.[115] However, a diary in Portland Museum's collection, written by Richard Comben, a lighthouse keeper at Portland Bill in 1822, indicates the possibility that Church Ope Cove was also a place to smuggle contraband brandy onto Portland (another possibility is that the brandy could have been legitimate salvage, of course). While the majority of his diary shows lists of daily supplies and verses of a popular song at the time, in key pages, Richard Comben refers to picking up barrels of brandy off the Portland Coast:

> *"October the 12 1822 pickd up a Cag of salt Brandy Down To Ruckets parases R Comben CC senr CC junr Ceaser Brought it on shore. The first That he Brought on shore with any Liquer in it*
>
> *Oct^r^ 16 score Killd fathers Two pigs Wensday octr 23 1822 Richard Comben LH pickd up a Stink Buss Cag Down to Butts*
>
> *Monday January 21 1823 Two Boats Took up a raft of Cags up under Chin and Took in the Boatmen with Them To Take Them up*
>
> *Monday March 23 pickd up a Cag of StinkBuss Brandy up under Shack Cliff and gat about a pint and Half apiece".*[116]

[115] https://www.burtonbradstock.org.uk/History/Smuggling/Smuggling.htm

[116] Richard Comben, *Diary* (1822), Portland Museum Collection. Transcript, R. Samways

His writing indicates that not only he, but others at the lighthouse were involved in picking up these barrels of brandy, taking a percentage of the goods for their labour. While it's not clear where Comben would have brought in these goods, the places he lists, such as the 'Butts' are located just off the east coast of Portland, suggesting he would have launched his boat from the east. Indeed, one entry in his diaries indicates that he kept his boat at Church Ope Cove, and so it is possible he would have rowed out from the cove, and returned there with these goods:

> *"July 11 1822 saw a boat fill in the Portland Race with Two men in her and went over to Church Hope [sic] and Launchd and went most of to the Shambles and pickd up one man and the other was Drownd She was a gentlemans Yacht from Plymouth for Weymouth with a gentleman and a sailor the gentleman was Drownd and the sailor was saved Wee pickd up several Boxes Besides and gat about 5s and 6d Each 6 pound in the whole among Ten of us".*[117]

As this diary entry also suggests, shipwrecks were common off the east coast of Portland, near to Church Ope Cove, particularly off the sand spit known as 'the shambles'. One famous example at the time, *The Earl of Abergavenny*, was a merchant trading ship travelling to China for the British East India Company, which ran aground in February 1805 with the loss of 272 lives.[118] The ship itself was captained by John Wordsworth, the brother of the poet William Wordsworth, carrying luxury goods such as books, lace, perfume and silver to trade, worth approximately £270,0000.[119] In the early 19th century, it would have been local men with boats, such as Richard Comben, who would have rowed out to rescue survivors. However, it is suggested that Portlanders also enjoyed many of the benefits of such merchant wrecks, plundering the ships cargo once the storms had abated. Indeed, there was a local breed of dog in the 19th century, known as the Portland Sea Dog, that was trained to help rescue drowning men and women at sea, but who was also apparently adept at collecting barrels of spirits.

There are many Portland legends about the places where smugglers would have brought in and stored their goods. Many local people still speak of their ancestors keeping contraband in the eaves of houses, in local caves, and using tunnels to discreetly bring smuggled goods inland. In her book, 'A Portland Vase' (published 1949), Sarah Pearce describes popular smuggling routes in the 19th century:

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[117] Ibid.

[118] Vicky Marshall, *Research Report for Church Ope Project* (November, 2019)

[119] https://janeaustensworld.wordpress.com/tag/ship-wrecks-off-dorset-coast/

> *"There are some [smuggling holes] on the beach near St George's Church, All Saints Church. In Will Stone's garden and in the gardens on the left going up […]*
>
> *An old fisherman named Wiggett gave an account in the early days of smuggling. They had a great haul and loaded 150 kegs of brandy at Church Ope. Wiggett a smuggler himself, joined the Revenue men and became part of the Revenue Cutter 'The Eagle'. He rejoiced in sending other smugglers to Dorchester Gaol.*[120]

More recently, a letter from Mr Campbell to the Free Portland News, recalls his 'Granny Stone', who had told them about carrying smuggled goods when she was young:

> *"as a young woman she would hide in the coastal quarries until she was secretly handed bags of spirits, which she would put under her skirts and tie around her waist. Skirts were very long in those days even for the younger women. She would then proceed on her arduous walk to Weymouth […] When Granny was talking to us I believe her age to have been 90 plus, the date about 1916. If this was so she must have been born about 1826".*[121]

As part of the 'History, Myths and Legends of Church Ope Cove' project, Ian Baird and Paula Stott explored the popular myth of smugglers' tunnels from Wakeham down to Church Ope Cove and the Weares. Ian recently moved into Tudor Cottage in Wakeham, which was originally built in 1680 as a pair of agricultural cottages owned by St Andrew's Church. Shortly after moving, he was informed by former owner, Anne Edbrook (resident from 1981-2014) of a blocked tunnel entrance behind a false wall in the hallway. As Ian recalls:

> *"Anne has recently visited the cottage and indicated that the blocked tunnel entrance is behind a false wall in the hall of the property and that there was a structure behind it in what is now the dining room descending into the tunnel. This structure (which would have been under the stairs, since moved) has been blocked off at floor level […] Anne states that she saw both the arch in the wall and the blocked entrance to the tunnel, presumably before the floor was laid. She further states that the owner prior to her, Mr Richard Grapes, the quondam owner of the Grapes Dental Surgery in Straits, was the person who had it blocked up, considering it to be dangerous with two young daughters in the house".*[122]

While he has yet to excavate this tunnel entrance, there is suggestion of a rubble filled void under another section of floor at Tudor Cottage between the stairs and fireplace, which may be part of a cellar under the property. It is not known whether this is part of the tunnel in the hallway or part of a larger cellar or tunnel. As yet, there is no evidence this space would have been used to smuggle contraband. However, this story comes from a

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[120] Sarah Pearce, *A Portland Vase* (1949), p.30

[121] Letter from Mr Campbell, 'Granny Stone - Smuggler' in *Free Portland News*, No. 163 (May 1992), p.10.

[122] Ian Baird, Report by Ian Baird and Paul Stott for Church Ope Cove project (November, 2019).

popular mythology of smuggling tunnels from Church Ope to Wakeham. An article by Harry Comben, in the Free Portland News (1995), alludes to a similar tunnel running from a house in Wakeham down to Church Ope Cove. Harry Comben recalls that his uncle, Bartholomew Comben, had "a passage from his house out towards the cliff. He went back to the 1840s when the 'cliff climbers' could have been active".[123] Census and tithe records reveal that Bartholomew Comben was long term resident in lower Wakeham, having two properties at what now appear to be numbers 203 and 207 Wakeham. Indeed, there are many other tunnels and underground chambers found along the Dorset coast that have been used for smuggling, including one at Portman Lodge, near Bournemouth Square which was discovered in 1930. Ultimately however, it is difficult to entirely prove or disprove how and why these tunnels were used.[124]

Ian and Paula's research suggests that any potential tunnels would likely not have been constructed purely for the purpose of smuggling, due to the immense labour of such an undertaking. However, they conclude that any tunnels used for smuggling may have been crafted using previously existing rifts or fissures in the limestone, of which there are many at Church Ope and the East Weares. Ian and Paula explored several caves nearby, including Cherty Rift and Australia Rift Caves, which show extensive spaces that could have been used to store goods, or as possible tunnels inland. Indeed, while Australia Rift runs around 80ft back into the rock, Cherty Rift is around 185ft long, and 80ft high in places, possibly enabling a large space to hide goods brought in at Church Ope. While it's not known who the 'cliff climbers' referred to by Harry Comben are, it has been suggested that the popular activity of climbing the cliffs to find bird eggs in the 19th and 20th centuries, would have given local people considerable knowledge of the caves and fissures like Cherty and Australia rift, which could have been used for other, less legal activities.

There are many local legends that Church Ope Cove was used as a place to bring in smuggled goods. Although few in number, looking particularly at Stuart Morris's references, it seems there *is* substantiated evidence for these activities. It may be that many of the folklore legends are the result of a romanticised vision of smuggling and piracy, which was heightened in the later 19th and early 20th centuries by authors like J. Meade Falkner (*Moonfleet*, 1898), Rudyard Kipling (*Puck of Pooks Hill*, 1906) and Winston Graham (*Poldark* series, first published in 1945-1953). When he visited the Island in 1858, Charles Dickens must have picked up some of these legends, suggesting that smuggling had largely ceased by the mid-19th century:

> *"This no want of boldness among Portlanders. With fourteen vessels, averaging seventy tons each, we carried on the 'free trade' merrily, within the memory of man. It is commonly reported on the spot that of all the owners of those formidable luggers, not a descendant is now living. In many of the old houses in the upper*

[123] Harry Comben, 'Looking through the Bake House Door' in *Free Portland News*, No.197 (March 1995)

[124] Roger Guttridge, *Dorset Smugglers* (1986) pp. 87-88

villages, may be seen large holes, which were used as Smugglers Caves. But the trade seems to have died out with the descendants of the owners of the fourteen vessels".[125]

As an illegal trade, it is unlikely that those involved in smuggling would have left significant evidence of their activities. Indeed, as Dickens suggests, many of the traces of this history more likely survived in oral testimony and folklore. These smuggling legends, as with the 'pirates' graves' at St Andrew's Church, speak to a long self-proclaimed spirit of anti-authoritarianism on Portland, which aligns itself with the hardy heroic image of the smuggler or pirate. The Portland poet Skylark Durston described Portlanders as "unable to appreciate officialdom, well meaning or otherwise".[126] Whether it was the legends of ancient Portlanders protecting the Island by throwing stones from the cliffs, quarrymen setting down their tools against the demands of the London masons in the 17th century, or the locals defying John Penn in his claims of their common land; the self-proclaimed Portland spirit sits well with the image of the smuggler, using their knowledge of the land and sea around Portland and their close-knit local community ties, to defy the authority of the 'foreign' customs officials.

[125] Charles Dickens, 'Portland Island' in *Household Words* (April 17th, 1858), p. 424

[126] Skylark Durston quoted in Jane Taylor (ed), *From When I was a Boy. Upon This Ancient Rock - Skylark Durston Remembered* (2016)

Fishing Industry at Church Ope Cove

In Fido Lunettes' 'An historical and descriptive account of the peninsula of Portland from the earliest to the present time' (1825), the author describes the people of Portland as historically dependent on three forms of employment: "in the quarries, fishing and agriculture". While this is a simplified picture, as an Island, the everyday importance of fishing has a long history on Portland, with evidence of early Palaeolithic and Mesolithic inhabitants living on fish and shellfish. Discussing Portland in the early 19th century, Lunettes describes the "considerable fishery on this coast" between Lyme and Portland, remarkable, particularly for mackerel, when "sometimes 20,000 mackerel, are caught at one draught".[127] Much of Portland's historic fishing is associated with Chesil and the Fleet, however, Church Ope Cove has long been a place for fishing and potting, particularly valued for its protected cove. Indeed, as suggested before, the naming of the parish church in the 15th century, as St Andrew's, the patron saint of fishermen, alludes to the historic importance of fishing to the cove.

Early photography in the 19th century suggests that larger fishing boats were launched from the cove by horse and cart from the beach.[128] However, later, a series of poles and a winch were installed, as well as the quarry crane at Durdle pier often being used by fishermen to launch their boats.[129] Speaking of his childhood at Church Ope in the 1930s, KJS remembers using the crane to go fishing with his friends:

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[127] Fido Lunettes, *An historical and descriptive account of the peninsula of Portland from the earliest to the present time* (London, 1825), pp. 35-36.

[128] Photograph from 'Horse and Harp', *Free Portland News* No. 62 (December 1983)

[129] Peter Trim, *The Quarrying of Portland Stone* (1991), p. 7. Photographs from Geoff Kirby http://www.geoffkirby.co.uk/PortlandArchivePictures/html/coastline.html#churchopecove

"Pudge Masters and Pixie Stone and I used to go out, but I was a lot younger then and you know […] they did the hard work, the rowing, and put the boat in the water you did it by crane […] I used to work the crane, technical stuff, and we used to go fishing".[130]

The changing technologies used to launch boats at Church Ope Cove speaks not only of the changing uses of the cove, and the loss of the quarrying industries on the East and Penn Weares, but also to the changing landscape of the cove itself and the impact that quarries had on the shape and shingle of the beach. While earlier boats may have been dragged up a sandy beach, increased rocks and shingle brought in off the quarries led to animosity with local fishermen, and possibly to agreements with the stone firms to use the crane in recompense.[131]

The type of boat that fishermen at Church Ope would have used in the 19th century is likely to have been a 'Lerret' - an open clinker-built rowing boat, roughly 16ft long, which would have been rowed by two or four pairs of rowers. These craft were originally designed for fishermen at Chesil beach, and popular across Portland, with their sharp stern and high post, designed to launch and beach up the steep shingle.[132] At Church Ope however, photographs suggest other types of boats were also kept at the cove including smaller rowing dinghies. Popular catches would have included plaice, mackerel, and bass, caught seasonally. As Mr Male described in his interview to the Portland Heritage Trust Study Centre in the 1980s:

> *"Round April, when the mackerel came in to feed with the tide, they would shoot the nets round them. April to September they'd go potting for crabs and lobsters, then they'd bring the gear ashore and clean it and put it away 'til next April. Bass,*

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[130] KJS, interviewed by Persefoni Salter and Suzi Kirby (November 2019).

[131] Stuart Morris, *Portland: An Illustrated History*, p.125

[132] wikipedia

pollock and whiting would come round between September and Christmas. After Christmas they'd go out, I used to go with my Uncle Eddie, trawling for scallops from the 'Hood' down to Grove Point. Me and Uncle Eddie caught over a hundred dozen in one day. In January, trots would be put out at North Shore for catching sharppet, skate and dogfish. The catch was sold at Annie's in Weymouth and also to Pitman. Some were sold to Billy Gillenham and others. At times, locals would be waiting for their return. A man called Bob Hammond would pay 15 shillings a hundred for mackerel".[133]

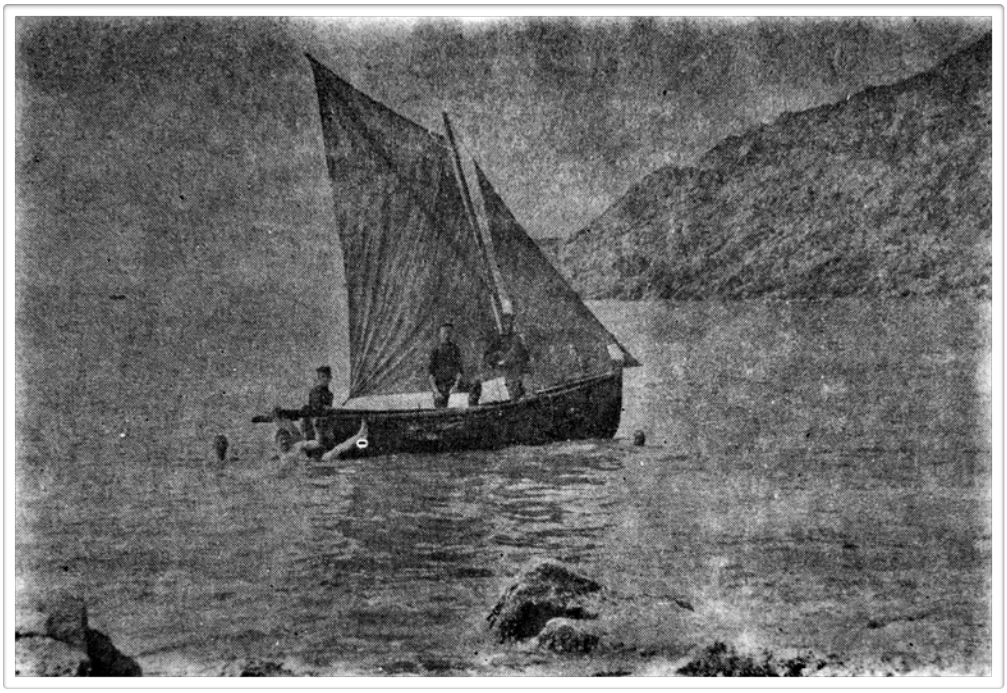
The photograph above shows the community of fishermen and local men who would have used Church Ope Cove, standing outside one of their huts on the beach.[134] From his research, Geoff Kirby has named many of them including: (Left to Right:) Tom Collins, Tom Stone, Charlie Gibbs, William Gibbs, "Lurcher" Binks, Jack Ayles "Sarge", "Jokes" Stone, Brooks Stone, Tom Stone (with whale jaw), "Crook" Read, and Jack Rodd. The photograph reveals a lot about the daily life of the cove and the type of catch the men

[133] Mr Male in oral histories conducted by the Portland Heritage Trust Study Centre in the 1980s (from transcriptions at the PHTSC).

[134] Photograph of fishermen at Church Ope Cove, http://www.geoffkirby.co.uk/PortlandArchivePictures/html/fishing.html

might have brought in, including what appears to be a dogfish, and, extraordinarily, evidence of whale bones (although it's unknown if these were caught or found).

While fishing was a common profession for Portlanders, it was also a popular leisure pursuit, and an important food source for ordinary Islanders. Lobster potting and crabbing were common amongst all age groups, and the skill of how to catch and where to look, passed down through generations.[135] As Bob Wollage recounts in the 1970s:



> *"Searchin' crab holes has been a long standing past time of Portlanders for generations. The best holes being jealously guarded secrets, and known only to a few that had them handed down from Fathers, and Great Grandfathers in some cases. With the exception of three holes, known at the West side of the Island, the remainder can only be found between Godnor Point and Bill Point on the east side […] There is nothing easy about searching, and unless you know how to get about, it can be dangerous. It has been past down in our folk lore, although no one has confirmation that there is any truth in it, that a man was drowned when trapped by the hand - "when the crab lifted". Any Portlander will know what is meant when I used the term "lifted", if you are not quick enough at the first touch, the crab will push, and you can be trapped".[136]*

A popular past-time for children was to catch limpets and cook them down at the cove. Mr Comben recalled his boyhood at Church Ope Cove, and how he would *"knock limpets, get a jam tin, boil 'em up and eat them. They were horrible to eat but you used to*

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[135] Photograph from 1908, http://www.geoffkirby.co.uk/PortlandArchivePictures/html/fishing.html

[136] R.W. Wollage, *Soft Burr & Whitbed: More of Portland in Tale, Poem & History* (1979), p. 28

do it, scrape all the stuff out from the inside".[137] These memories from Portlanders who spent their childhoods at Church Ope Cove in the early 20th century, suggest how the beach changed in use from more professional fishing activities, to leisure and recreational use. Many Portlanders speak fondly of summers spent swimming and sailing off the beach, catching fish for fun rather than to sell. The photograph below from Mr White that was shared in the Free Portland News, suggests this idyllic view of fishing from a sailboat at the cove becoming a common fixture of childhoods from the early 20th century.[138]

[137] Mr Comben quoted from, *Oral histories conducted by the Portland Heritage Trust Study Centre in the 1980s* (from transcriptions at the PHTSC).

[138] Mr White, 'Sailfishing' in *Free Portland News* No. 81 (July, 1985).

Leisure and Recreation at Church Ope Cove

Research by Persephoni Salter and Suzi Kirby

In the Victorian period, Church Ope Cove became an incredibly popular site for tourists to visit on Portland. In the 18th century, it had been aristocratic figures like John Penn who enjoyed the pleasures of the cove as a place for bathing and recreation, but by the 19th century, a booming middle-class was also drawn to Church Ope Cove as they also began to enjoy leisure time and travel. Many of these visitors were drawn by the mythology of landmarks like Pennsylvania Castle and Rufus Castle, which were romanticised in tourist guides and leaflets. One describes Rufus Castle as the:

Romantic keep that crowns the rocky shore,
Thy palmy days of battle are no more,
And shaft from thee shall never drink again,
The blood of Viking or of plundering Dane.
Yet, when the sunlight dies upon the sea,
Thy walls shall witness other archery;
For Cupid here shall string his golden bow,
And lay the swain at feet of Beauty low.[139]

The cove also attracted artists and writers, who immortalised a sense of rugged romanticism, choosing often to depict the ruins of Rufus Castle standing over the beach with fishermen or quarrymen at work below. John William Upham completed a series of

[139] Poem quoted from a tourist guide in the 1880s, https://www.dorsetecho.co.uk/news/features/lookingback/17817895.guide-describes-portland-place-weather-extremes-felt-acutely/

drawings and watercolours of Church Ope from around 1801 to 1821. JMW Turner later visited, producing a series of sketches of 'Bow and Arrow Castle' in 1811, which were later made into a popular etching in 1817. Other famous visitors included Thomas Hardy, whose last novel, 'The Well Beloved' (1892), immortalised what is now Portland Museum by naming one of the cottages after the heroine, 'Avice's' cottage, and including Pennsylvania Castle as the romantic 'Sylvania Castle'. Hardy was close friends with the author and paleobotanist, Marie Stopes, who had purchased Avice's cottage in 1923, seeking an escape from London life and continuing her interest and research in the palaeobotany of the Island. Stopes, who was known to scandalise locals by swimming naked at Church Ope Cove, also enjoyed her leisure time on the beach with her son. She founded Portland Museum at her cottage in 1930, which itself become a popular tourist attraction on the Island.

While it was the artists of the early 19th century who immortalised the cove, by the end of the century, the new trend of middle-class visitors to the Island also bought into the idyllic imagery of it, buying popular postcards of landmarks such as Rufus Castle and Pennsylvania Castle. This is illustrated in the postcard to Miss Garyland in Surrey (below), who recounts she is "having a lovely time down here. We have been to Portland to day (sic)".[140] The popularity of the postcard explains the prevalence of photography in recording the history of Church Ope Cove. It indicates the way in which these depictions of the cove represent an idealised vision of the area, in the way it was packaged and sold to visitors, rather than being always an accurate picture of everyday life there.

From the mid-19th century, it was an increasingly popular past-time to take a tourist boat from Weymouth to Portland to enjoy the sights. In 1858, Charles Dickens describes arriving on Portland by steamer to view the quarries and the formation of the breakwater.[141] One company in particular, Cosens, took advantage of this new industry, moving from work as coal merchants, engineers and lightermen, to take tourists along the

[140] Postcard with thanks to Helena Berry.

[141] Charles Dickens, 'Portland Island' in *Household Words* (April 17th, 1858), p.423

Wessex Coast.[142] In June 1860, a small dinghy manned by young boys was rescued by Joseph Cosens in the steamer 'Prince', as it drifted towards the Race. News reports recounted how the boys were part of a small private sailing party. They had gone ashore at Church Ope Cove and had taken the dinghy out for a row on their own.[143]


ADVERTISEMENTS. 53

COSENS & CO., LIMITED,
Steam Boat Proprietors, Coal Merchants, Engineers, Lightermen, &c., &c.

OFFICE—CUSTOM HOUSE QUAY, WEYMOUTH.

WEYMOUTH & PORTLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY.

All Passengers by this Company's Boats are exempt from Pile Pier tolls at Weymouth.
Annual, Monthly, or Weekly Tickets for the Pier Promenade to be had at the Toll-house.

THE STEAM LAUNCH PRINCESS,
Fitted with handsome Ladies' Saloon, and every family convenience, to be had on hire for Private Picnics, Fishing, or Excursion Parties.

By the 1870s, Cosens were running popular 'coasting trips' along the coast from Lulworth Cove and around charming spots on Portland, with passenger boats becoming more and more common. One such steamer, the S.S. Bournemouth, was wrecked on the rocks near Portland Bill in 1886, with all 160 passengers onboard, rescued. Most passenger boats would either tour the coast or drop passengers at Portland Harbour to travel by foot or horse and cart, to Church Ope. In the early 20th century, steamers landed at the cove on two occasions. The first, in July 1911, was the passenger steamer 'Victoria', which landed at the cove for a fundraising tea in the grounds of Pennsylvania Castle.[144] The second, in May 1914, was for another fundraising event at All Saints Church in Easton.

Writing to the Free Portland News, George Davey recalled his mother and aunt having tea at Church Ope when the paddle steamer arrived:

> *"The date was 1911 and the Paddle Steamer, which came from Bournemouth, landed its passengers on to the beach by way of a gang plank. After a while there was a panic. Where's our George? (George was my cousin). He had walked up the*

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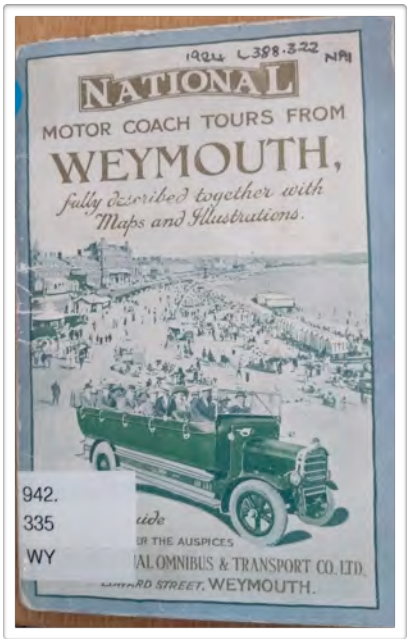
[142] *Illustrated guide to Weymouth, Portland and the Adjacent neighbourhood* (1905), Dorset History Centre Archive, p. 53

[143] Richard Clammer, *Cosens Of Weymouth 1848 -1918* (2001), p.55

[144] Stuart Morris, *Portland in old picture postcards* (1983), p. 72

gang plank and gone aboard. Aunty Ginny hurried across the beach, and on to the paddle steamer to search for him, but it was too late! By the time she found her son, the ship was afloat and was on the way back to Bournemouth where Aunty Ginny and her wayward son had to spend the night, and then had to travel back by train the next day".[145]

Remembered well by Portlanders, these landings at Church Ope were incredibly popular, but, with the outbreak of the First World War, many steamers were requisitioned for Naval service as mine sweepers, and trips to Church Ope Cove ceased. However, in July 1934, the Portland Publicity Committee approached Cosens to request that paddle steamers should once again call at Church Ope Cove, below Pennsylvania Castle. While it's unclear whether any negotiations took place, it's an indicator of how popular these trips were.[146] Following the Second World War, the steamer business went into significant decline with the last Cosens Paddle Steamer, 'Embassy' being decommissioned in 1966.



As well as arriving by boat, motor transport became an increasingly popular mode of travelling to Church Ope Cove in the early 20th century. While roads around Portland were often in poor condition in the 19th century, due to the use of heavy traction engines by the quarrying industry, tourists would visit Portland by horse and cart, and later, by railway. However, by the 1920s, motor transport opened new horizons, particularly with the arrival of the *charabanc,* a long motor car with benched seats arranged in rows, used for large parties of people. Companies like Blue Bird Co ran popular tours around Portland; the Island Tour No.11, for example, would pick up passengers from the ferry, touring Chesil Beach, Fortuneswell, St Peters Church, Borstal Home, Church Ope Cove, Easton and Weston, before heading back to the passenger boat. As the company wrote in its promotional literature for the tours, significant features included the landmarks around Church Ope Cove:

"Passing through Easton we arrive at Church Hope Cove, where a halt is made allowing time to explore the sweetly pretty cove, and Pennsylvania Castle, a private mansion, practically on the edge of the cliffs […] Adjoining the grounds is the picturesque ruin of Rufus Castle".[147]

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[145] George Davey, 'Church Ope Memories' in *Free Portland News* No. 361 (November 2008).

[146] Richard Clammer, *Cosens of Weymouth 1918 -1996*, p71

[147] *National Motor Coach Tours from Weymouth*, Dorset History Centre Archives, p.44.

From 1865, a branch of the railway line that ran from Weymouth to Portland, brought new visitors to the Island. The railway opened a new station at Easton in 1902, and until its closure in 1965, brought passengers into the heart of Portland and within walking distance of Church Ope Cove.[148]

To cope with this booming tourist industry, many shops, inns and cafes opened in Wakeham to cater for these new visitors. The Mermaid Inn advertised itself in local newspapers and leaflets, including the brochure for Cosens passenger boats, highlighting its position "near Church 'Ope Cove and Pennsylvania Castle". Early proprietors include Robert Rod in the 1870s, Frank Pellett in the 1890s, and later H.M. Attwooll and Mr Leggatt. As well as being a popular public house, the premises apparently also had rooms to let as well as a a "fine skittle alley" which was still in use within living memory.[149] The name of the inn itself refers to a popular legend at Church Ope Cove from the 18th century, about a mermaid who washed ashore at Church Ope Cove and was taken up to St Andrew's Church, where she died.[150] Not much is known about the origins of the legend, but according to local folklore, a number of mermaids have washed up at Church Ope Cove. More recently, the Mermaid Inn was transformed into a tea garden, which closed around 2014, and has since become a private dwelling.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, there were a number of popular cafes at Church Ope Cove, catering to day visitors and summer residents, as well as to local people in the summer. Some of these were formal cafe premises, but others were temporary huts on the beach. As part of the oral history recordings for their research, Persefoni Salter and Suzi Kirby interviewed KJS about his memories of the cove in the late 1930s. He recalled a woman who had a cafe on the beach when he was a child:

"She used to have a cafe there, Ethel Honeyman, yes carrying stuff up an down the bloody steps it was the problem, she got spring water, no they did have a tap with running water down there […] The holiday centre of Portland there (at Church Ope) […] I don't know what they used for heating down there, they used Paraffin or Calor gas, but carrying a bottle of bloody Calor gas

[148] Stuart Morris, *Portland in Old Picture Postcards* (1983), pp. 69-70.

[149] *Guide to the Cosens Fleet*, The Buff Funnell Book (1960)

[150] http://www.geoffkirby.co.uk/Portland/695710/

Situated at the top of Church Ope Road, a well known cafe was Leggett's Tea Room, also known as Pennsylvania Tea Gardens. The cafe was started by Mr G. J. Leggett, who had also been the proprietor of The Mermaid Inn. He purchased Pennsylvania Cottage in 1892 to open a tea garden with his wife, Annie. Mr Leggett had an extraordinary life; as well as his career as a publican, he was rumoured to have worked as the head baker on the HMS Discovery, for the Antarctic Expedition led by Captain George Nares from 1901 - 1904*. He brought back from the Ascension Islands a parrot known as 'Pollywinko' who became a feature of Leggets Tea Garden, and had "a vast and obscene vocabulary":

"His favourite trick was to call out early in the morning, 'Annie! Annie! Milk! Milk! Milk!' and then scream with laughter when Mrs Annie Leggett went to collect the undelivered milk".[157]

When Mr Leggett died, his widow, Annie, kept running the tea garden until April 1921, when she let the premises to Mr. G. Cooper on an annual rent of £25 with an agreement 'to keep the tea houses and other landlord's fixtures on the premises in good repair and condition'. In October 1926, the house and gardens were sold by Henry Sansom of Pennsylvania Castle, who let the building and yard to a Mr 'Gunner' Tolman around 1938. The premises were later let to Mr Hoare in 1948/1950, who opened what became 'Church Ope Cafe' when the Leggett's Tea Gardens closed. Pennsylvania Cottage was eventually sold by Sansom to the local GP, Dr J Doran in 1953, and in the 1970s became the Church Ope Pottery, run by Carenza Heyhoe, before becoming a private house.[158]

[157] David Hawkins, 'That cafe' in *Free Portland News* No. 188 (June 1994), p. 8.

[158] Postcard of Pennsylvania Tea Gardens (1937) with thanks to Persefoni Salter; Postcard of Pennsylvania Tea Gardens, Geoff Kirby website; 'Tea Gardens' in *Free Portland News* (April 1994).

Another popular supplier at Church Ope Cove was Mr Dixon, who sold ice creams from a cart at the top of the steps in the 1920s and 30s. First sold by Carlo Gatti 1851, the development of fridges and imports of ice from America and Norway brought ice cream as a luxury for the middle and upper classes in the late 19th century. They were associated particularly with holidays at the seaside. The photograph below, *circa* 1904, shows Mr Dixon selling ices from a horse and cart at the top of the steps at Church Ope Cove. The photograph includes young siblings Iris and Frank Miller, and to their right is Mrs Annie Leggatt, of Pennsylvania Tea Gardens.[159] The ice cream he sold was probably made locally, possibly by Brian's Dairy in Fortuneswell.[160] By the 1930s, KJS has suggested that Mr Dixon had progressed to selling his ice cream across Portland by way of a bicycle and cart.[161]

The beach wasn't only popular with tourists, but was a place where Portlanders went during their leisure time. The past-time of 'sea bathing' was first popularised by George III when he visited Weymouth and Portland between 1789 and 1805, although, it was seen as an elite activity rather than a leisure pursuit for working people, with elaborate 'bathing machines' taking visitors down into the sea. However, by the late 19th century - and especially in the early decades of the 20th century - sea swimming became increasingly popular with members of all classes. Indeed, Church Ope Cove became a favourite swimming spot, with generations of Portlanders learning to swim there.

Recalling his childhood in the 1920s, Harry Comben wrote a regular series in the Free Portland News recounting his days swimming at Church Ope Cove. Throughout the series, he recounts his relief at leaving the school classroom at 4:00 pm and heading down to Church Ope Cove on a friend's bike, for a swim:

> *"Our 'bathers' were taken to school, to save time, and the path from 'Millers Cafe' was downhill, after the bike was parked in the corner of 'Gaffer's Field'. The steps to Church Ope were taken four at a time and so on to the short cut to the boys' rocks. it was 'boys' rocks and 'girls' rocks' at that time. Mixed undressing was not allowed.*
>
> *The water always looked delicious, clean and clear, and whatever the weather, calm or rough, we enjoyed it. […] Time marched on and we hurried to swim*

[159] 'Dixon's Pure Ices' in *Free Portland News* No.195 (Jan 1995), p.18.

[160] 'Dairy - Ice Cream' in *Free Portland News* No. 221 (March 1997), p.14.

[161] KJS, interviewed by Persefoni Salter and Suzi Kirby (November 2019).

ashore, get dressed and make tracks for home our Dads got home from work at 5 o'clock".[162]

Many Portlanders we spoke to for this project remembered the segregation of the 'boys pool' and the 'girls pool', where children would learn to swim and paddle before they swam in the sea:

> *"left hand side was the boys side, right hand side was the girls side, they had a, built a sort of swimming pool that you could only go [in at] high tide, otherwise there was no bloody water in there, and we used to go swimming there, and they did have a swimming club there".*

TM remembers learning to swim at Church Ope Cove as a young boy in the 1940s, and a particularly memorable swimsuit which was made for him at the time:

> *"My first memory of Church Ope (and it is a very vivid one) is captured in this photo. One the reverse my mother has written, 'T 4 years old (1948) Church Ope beach'. The reason it is so clear in my mind is firstly the swimming costume which was knitted by her from an unpicked pullover due to the rationing […] on entering the water it instantly floated around the waist like a skirt and on leaving the water, then very wet and heavy, it instantly headed south to the ankle regions".*

(Photograph of TM, with thanks to TM and family)

After learning to swim in the smaller rock pools, children were keen to brave the sea, and learnt to navigate the sometimes treacherous waters at the cove. Writing about his childhood in the 1920s, Boy Mayle recounts that:

> *"After we learned to swim, no matter how frightening the great rollers might be pounding the beach, it was a matter of personal honour to 'go in and get our bathers wet'. This, at times needed great courage and even greater judgement; not so much to get in but out of the raging seas, for only a minor misjudgement of timing meant being hurled with great force high up on a rough pebble beach with*

[162] Harry Comben, 'Looking through the Bakehouse Door' in *Free Portland News* No. 202 (August. 1995)

stunning effect […] little did I think that the many pleasurable hours spent at Church Ope was for me the overture for the night of June 4th 1942. The ship in which I was serving was torpedoed and in the nine hours I spent in the water I had ample time to be grateful that I had learnt to swim at Church Ope".[163]

More recent memories of childhoods at the cove, recall the pleasures and perils of swimming there. AD recalls of his childhood in the 1970s, that when the 'Jersey Boats' were coming through, they created big waves on the beach that they used to play in:

"if you were a reasonable swimmer and the shout went up 'the Jersey boats' you rushed towards the water and the younger kids rushed away from the water and the younger ones that hadn't cottoned on learnt swift".[164]

Many who had spent their childhoods at Church Ope also recalled a raft, which they spent their summers swimming to, and diving off. According to Boy Mayle, this raft was built in the 1930s as a result of the economic depression, as unemployed men from the quarries spent their time at the cove:

"In 1933 the stone trade ran into deep depression; this affected both masons and quarrymen, many were out of work for two or three years and the remainder worked only a three day week. Many men with time on their hands and little money in their pockets, who had not swum for years, came down to the Cove and once again enjoyed at little or no cost, the freedom of the sea and sunshine […]

With time on their hands the more adventurous began to look for something more than just swimming and by punching off surfaces of rock to a level area, setting in holding down bolts, a diving board was fixed and added much to our pleasure. Unfortunately, this asset was short lived; left unattended over a week end a rough sea smashed it beyond repair. However the loss of the springboard triggered off a more ambitious idea, 'What about a raft'? With practically all the interested parties being either on the dole or working short time this grandiose idea seemed out of the question, but a committee was formed with Ted Pepperel as scrounger-in-chief, Johnie Hodder, George Davey and Jack Ayles as Secretary, and in no time large baulks of timber, long securing bolts and decking began to appear […]

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163 H.G.F Male, *Just a Few More Memories from a Portland 'Boy'*, pp. 10-12.

164 AD, Interviewed by Helena and Mike Berry (November 2019)

The great day for the launch arrived, three boats under oars, each with a sinker attached and connecting chains pulled off, dropped their moorings in a triangular pattern. Through a trapdoor in the decking the raft was attached and was then ready for all to use. In such depressing times that we were experiencing, this raft proved to be an extension to our interests and outlook. This was something that we had all helped to attain, something we had accomplished, and impossible goal achieved and to strive as a swimmer to be able to say, 'I can swim out to the raft' was a dream realised".[165]

According to KS, the raft was eventually destroyed by a storm, but it was certainly beloved, and many we spoke to for this project remembered swimming to it.[166]

George Davey, one of the committee members who helped build the raft in the 1930s, dedicated this poem to it in 1992:

"T'was built of timber stout and sound,
From hand-cranes jibs and stays we found,
Discarded in the quarries roads,
No longer used to hoist the loads,
[…]
Out to the mark, where we had found,
A holding in the mooring ground.
And on the platform of their choice,
The happy children would give voice,
When joining in their revelry,
To frolic in the summer sea".[167]

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[165] H.G.F Male, *Just a Few More Memories from a Portland 'Boy'*, pp. 10-12.

[166] KJS, interviewed by Persefoni Salter and Suzi Kirby (November 2019).

[167] George Davey, 'The Raft at Church Ope' in *Free Portland News* No.168 (October 1992), p. 18.

As well as time spent down at the beach, a number of local residents interviewed by Helen and Mike Berry referred to Mr Palmer's 'legendary' Lagonda, as being a key part of their childhood around Church Ope from the 1960s to the 1980s. Andy Dowler recalled that the Palmer Family "*had this car that managed to park at the top of.. the steps past the Museum and it was a Lagonda. And it was Chitty Chitty Bang Bang […] huge running boards, open backed tourer, headlights like dinner plates. I mean, probably it came from the 1940s but it was the sort of car even then, we're talking 1965-ish I suppose that everyone just stopped and looked at, it was a definite thing".*[168]
The Lagonda was clearly a local landmark, which locals would admire on their way down to the cove, and beloved by many who visited Church Ope Cove at that time.

***** Since the first version of this report was released, we have been made aware of the following information: Nare's (1831-1915) expedition on *Discovery* and *Alert* was to the Arctic in 1875/76. If Leggett was his baker, an educated guess would suppose that it was possibly to the Arctic on HMS *Alert;* then, still on *Alert* in 1878 when Nare sailed it to survey the Strait of Magellan where they might have called in on Ascension, hence the parrot. Nare's later career was within the harbour department of the Board of Trade.

[168] Andrew Dowler, interviewed by Helena and Mike Berry (November 2019).

Church Ope During WWII

During the Second World War, life at Church Ope Cove changed significantly, with army regiments balloted to the East Weares to defend the cove from invasion. Interviewed by the Portland Heritage Trust Study Centre in the 1980s, Mrs Chorley recalled the soldiers down at the cove during the war:

"We had a regiment of Scottish Borderers and they had huts down Church Ope, and at sunset no-one was allowed to go down. You could go down in the day, but when it was twilight a Scotsman would be at the top of Church Ope and he would call out, 'Come up! Come up! Come up! and everybody had to leave the weares and the beach and come up and then they would have a sentry marching across Church Ope and up over Cheyne. There was also another one in the castle itself, in the grounds.[169]

(Photograph of Michael Dowell (born 1938) with soldiers at Church Ope Cove in 1940.[170])

With fears of a German invasion on the rise, East Weares and Church Ope became increasingly important as strategic lookout points in anticipation of an enemy landing. In 1940, two pillboxes were constructed overlooking the cove, with local men called upon to take watch. Writing in the Free Portland News, Edward Andrews recalled joining the Naval Coast Watchers patrolling the cliffs around Church Ope at night:

> *"Any observations of suspicious activities in the sea area were to be reported to the Coastguards, to which the Patrols had to report. Being the regular Coastguard*

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[169] Mr Chorley quoted from, *Oral histories conducted by the Portland Heritage Trust Study Centre in the 1980s* (from transcriptions at the PHTSC).

[170] http://www.geoffkirby.co.uk/PortlandArchivePictures/html/world_war_2.html

station at Grove Point, and the Auxiliary Station at Church Ope. A Naval officer also paid a visit on most nights. I volunteered and we operated in pairs for one night a week […] our base was a Quarry hut at Stoney Bridge by the Company and I was glad my duties were in the Summer months, when the weather was fine".[171]

In addition to these pillboxes, a minefield was apparently laid at Church Ope, around 1940. It has been recalled that a number of wild sheep from the weares accidentally set off mines by wandering onto the beach during the war. In one particularly tragic incident, it has been suggested that a private in the Welsh Regiment balloted at Easton, committed suicide by entering the mined area in 1940, although the incident was kept quiet.[172] Remembering that night, Mr A Comben was an acting R.R.P. First Aider at the time, and wrote about going down to the cove when he heard the explosion:

"we were called out one autumn evening to an incident at Church Ope. When we arrived at the top of the steps we were met by Army personnel who were carrying a body up the steps, and we were informed that we were not required as this was an 'army matter'".[173]

As a strategic entry point to the Island, during the war, Church Ope Cove again became an important defensive site which needed to be protected, as it had done in centuries past. Even after the war, it was involved in breaches in security. In the late 1950s, the cove was famously the setting of a landing by Russian spies, aided by the Portland Spy Ring. The spy ring included Harry Houghton, a clerk at HM Naval Base Portland who was passing secrets to Russian spies. Houghton helped two Russian spies to land at Church Ope Cove at night, recommending it as a suitable spot due not only to its seclusion, but also its proximity to his caravan home on the cliffs. On the night itself, Houghton lit two red lights above the cove to guide the men in by motorboat, which it is believed came from a Russian boat or submarine in the channel. He then transported them by car to Blandford Forum, where the spies were driven away. Houghton also led a similar landing at Lulworth Cove and was arrested by British intelligence services.

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171 Edward Andrews, 'Church Ope Coastguards' in *Free Portland News* No. 248 (June 1999).

172 https://www.portlandhistory.co.uk/church-ope-cove.html

173 Mr A Comben, 'Incident at Church Ope - 1940' in *Free Portland News* No.241 (November 1998).

Church Ope Cove Beach Huts

Summary article by Project Co-ordinator Bea Moyes based on the research report of Helena & Mike Berry plus other project team members as credited.

As illustrated by the history of the raft at Church Ope Cove, the use of the beach as a place of recreation and leisure arose in parallel with the decline in its use as a place of labour for the quarrying and fishing industries on the Island. This is particularly apparent in the history of the beach huts along the cove in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The earliest references to built structures on the beach come in John William Upham's sketch of 'Bow and Arrow Castle' in 1801. It depicts two stone buildings to the north side of the cove, near a stone pier, suggesting they may have been used in relation to the quarries above. This interpretation is supported by a deed of church gift conveyance of 1826, from Mrs Martha Gollops to G.T. Steward Esq, which states ownership of:

> *"all that other stone pier called Gollops Pier situate on the South or South East part of the said Island at or near a place there called Church Hope now and for some time past unoccupied together with all buildings & erections and shears blocks capstans and fixtures of what nature or kind so ever of and of what belonging to the stone pier or now or heretofore used or now herewith in or to which".*[174]

These buildings do not appear on any maps the researchers had access to until 1864, when a 'Boat House' is shown to the north of the beach on the Ordnance Survey map in a similar location to the structures owned by Mrs Gollops.

It is not clear what this building(s) was used for or whether it was for the quarrying industry, however a property sale in May 1875 lists a "Boathouse situated at Church Ope used by the coastguard, and let to the Lord of the Admiralty the yearly rental of £5, sold for £18", suggesting that the building by this point was in use by the Coastguard.

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[174] Mrs Martha Gollops to G.T. Steward Esq, *Church Gift Conveyance of Castle & Church Ope Pier*, Dorset History Centre (D.1801/85)

Indeed, an extract from the Western Gazette on July 28th 1871 recalls a horrible incident which suggests the use of the hut for a local coastguard even earlier in the 1870s:

> *"PORTLAND. Body Washed Ashore.—The body of a man —apparently that of chip's carpenter—was washed ashore at Church Hope, on Thursday night. The body was discovered and got ashore by some Islanders, who conveyed it to the coastguard's boathouse. The man appeared to be about 35 years of age, has red hair, and was about five feet high. Both were gone, and nearly all the flesh from his face. his pockets were found sixpence, farthing, and a carpenter's bench knife. Mr. R. N. Howard having been communicated with, gave an order for his interment."*

This boathouse and the stone buildings in Upham's drawing continue to be visible in photographs in the early 1920s, with the boat house clearly maintained, while two smaller stone structures to its right look in an increasing state of dereliction, as do what may be other small stone huts further south of the boathouse (close to the cliff wall with fishing boats in front of them). CH, whose grandfather William Pearce owned the boathouse from the 1900s to the 1940s, suggests that it was destroyed by mines during the Second World War and that her grandfather was awarded compensation of £20 for loss of property.[175] However some older stone buildings, possibly the ones on the more southern part of the beach may still remain, at least in part.

Helena and Mike Berry spoke to VK for this project, who had taken photographs of a stone building beneath a current beach hut which show a small stone hut with stone vaulting and roof.

[175]CH, interviewed by Helena and Mike Berry (November 2019).

The use of hewn stone and the construction suggests the building may have been constructed by quarrymen as a shelter and possibly used later by fishermen (some men carried out both professions); however the exact uses are unknown.[176]

The history of the beach huts has long been associated with the fishing industry at the cove. Indeed, a local legend suggests that the earliest building on the beach was offered to a fisherman who saved the life of King George:

"The folklore is that King George III got into difficulties when swimming at Church Ope and was rescued by a fisherman. The King was so grateful that he offered the fisherman whatever he would like, telling him that he was the King. The fisherman didn't believe him but said he'd like a hut at Church Ope. True to his word the King gave him the 'compound' area which is why it was privately owned".[177]

While there is no evidence that this legend is true, its existence tells us a lot about the long association between fishing at the cove, and the beach huts. Looking at the Court Leet records, the earliest licence given to build a hut on the beach came in May 1852 when the court allowed Mr James Dike to erect a "building on the Commonable lands at Church Hope".[178] While it is not clear if James Dike was involved in fishing, the Court Leet records from 1901 suggests that by this point, many other huts had been built by fishermen at the cove:

> *"We also amerce the various Fishermen for erections at Church Ope in the sum of one shilling each with the exception of Encroachment No 5 (as appears by the plan produced) which sum shall be two shillings per annum. The said sums to be equally divided between the Crown and the Inhabitants".*

Photographs suggest that in the late 19th century a few other huts were already erected, many with fishing boats pulled up outside, suggesting their use as at least partially connected to fishing. However, in the two decades leading up to the First World War, there was a rapid increase in beach huts built at Church Ope to at least 24 buildings, but with far fewer fishing boats apparent on the beach. This is a rough measure of the shifting

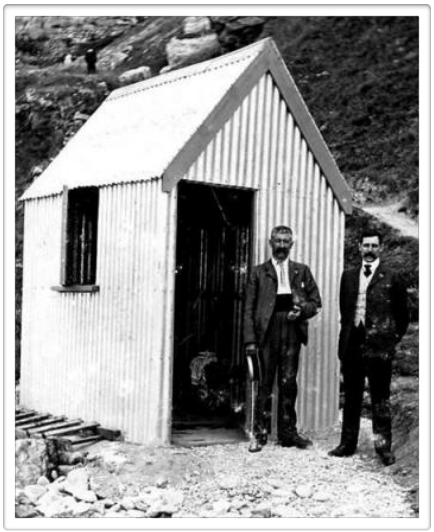
[176] Photographs with thanks to VK.

[177] VK, interviewed by Helena and Mike Berry (November 2019).

[178] Court Leet Presentments, records with thanks to Jane White.

beach hut ownership and use in this period. Indeed, many of the fishermen who still used the cove may have kept equipment there to take tourists and visitors on fishing day trips from Church Ope, rather than making their primary income from selling their catch. However, there was clearly a change as the beach shifted to being a place of recreation for Portlanders and visitors alike.

As part of their research for this project, Helena and Mike Berry interviewed MS, who spoke about her great-grandfather, William Pearce, a fisherman and beach hut owner at Church Ope Cove from around 1900 to the 1940s. Pearce had a fishing hut that he used for his equipment. However, he also built another, larger hut on the beach for his wife, who apparently wished to escape the smell of fish, and which is still in use by the family today.[179] Another interviewee, CH, suggested that men like William Pearce were the last generation of fishermen who had working huts on the beach. By the Second World War, the huts were largely "used as recreation rather than fishing".[180] Indeed, at the same time as fishermen like William Pearce were using the cove, men like George Ernest Fulleylove were also building huts on the beach. Born in Staffordshire, Fulleylove was neither a fisherman or quarrymen, but worked at Portland Prison. Having a white collar profession and financial resources, his hut was clearly a place to spend his leisure time. After his marriage in 1904, his family enjoyed their leisure time at Church Ope Cove.



[photographs of George Ernest Fulleylove's beach hut at Church Ope Cove. With thanks to Geoff Kirby and DF.]

Apart from the early stone buildings on the beach, photographs in the late 19th and early 20th century show that most huts were constructed with timber or corrugated iron, as illustrated by George Fulleylove's hut. These huts were largely constructed by hand, and brought down to the cove in sections. CH recalled that her grandfather, William Pearce, ordered his large hut in 1900 by catalogue, and it arrived by train, with several of William's

[179] MS, Interviewed by Helena and Mike Berry (November 2019).

[180] CH, Interviewed by Helena and Mike Berry (November 2019).

friends carrying it down to the cove to assemble it there. Speaking about the construction of these huts, AD asserts that, "*the best way is to build the hut in sections somewhere else and carry out over the walls and just bolt it together on site".*[181] Speaking about more recent history, he tells the story of some "London people" who bought a hut and:

"immediately had it flattened and had a new hut put in its place and.. this hut's beautiful and had all fitted bunk beds and gas lighting and all sorts of things we'd never seen before. But before they started assembling it, they were wandering around picking up rocks and looking very puzzled and eventually we… asked what they were looking for and they were looking for the powerpoints because they were all clutching all power drills and stuff."

His story indicates the DIY spirit inherent in many of these huts' history; built, maintained and reconstructed many times over generations. AD suggests that in the 1970s and 80s, many of these huts were built or repaired by a man called Bill Peters who had a timber reclamation yard in Weston Street, and it was due to him that many of the huts had "a better standard of construction than you see in what I call a B&Q shed". This strength of construction is necessary to withstand the storms and floods which often affect the cove. VK recalls a 'tornado' at Church Ope around 1967, when the roof of their family's hut was blown up onto Cheyne Weares. Indeed, the Great Storm of 1989 caused significant damage and destruction of many huts at the cove, as shown by these photographs from V&M K (below).[182]

In keeping with what has happened to the beach huts at Portland Bill and the West Weares, the beach huts at Church Ope Cove today are owned about 50/50 by Portlanders and non-Portlanders alike, for leisure and recreation at the cove. With more than 56 huts (54 in private hands and 2 let by the Court Leet), many worth around £20,000 each, the beach huts at Church Ope are considerable assets, as well as being

[181] AD, Interviewed by Helena and Mike Berry (November 2019).

[182] Photographs of the storm damage in December 1989, with thanks to V&M K.

vessels of local history.[183] As MK has said, *"there's no doubt about it that those huts inside are a little time capsule",* with stories attached to each one. TM bought his first beach hut for £95 in 1966/7, and his current hut from Mrs Sansom in 1968 for £135. For him, the hut has been a place his family have spent their summers for the past 50 years, as he says "Church Ope remains doubly-blessed. There is as yet no mobile phone reception or motor vehicle access" so it is "a true haven, long may it remain so. Such places are becoming all too rare".[184] These photographs show many happy summers spent at the cove with his family, sitting and sunbathing in a little walled area at the front of their hut.

(Photographs from TM, with thanks to TM and family)

Today, rather than being working huts used by quarrymen or fishermen, the huts have come to represent a retreat from the stresses of working life, and a place of relaxation and community. As LS suggests:

"Everyone comes here for quiet and rest and space and I suppose we're all the sort of people who value that enough to have a beach hut so there is a sense of a bit of a community or tribe of beach hut owners despite them being very different people".[185]

While some huts are owned by so called 'kimberlins' - non-Portlanders - many locals still own huts that have been passed down through generations of their families. As MK says, the cove is "a magical place. It's within half a mile of where we live but it could be […] in a foreign land". For many interviewed by Helena and Mike Berry as part of this project, their long connection to the cove has allowed a renewed observation of time and nature. As LS says, "*it's absolutely amazing how much continual change there is […] there's a constant*

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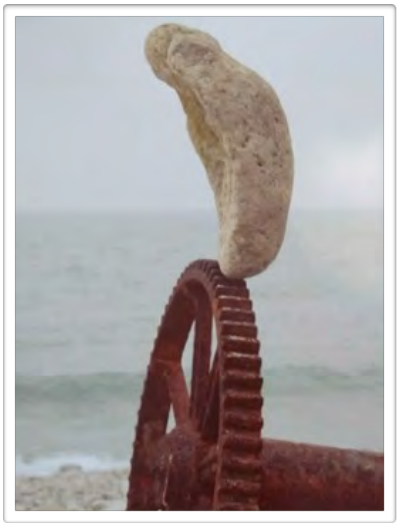
[183] Helena and Mike Berry, *Research Report for Church Ope Cove Project* (November 2019).

[184] TM, Research Report for the Church Ope Project (November 2019. Photographs with thanks to TM and family.

[185] LS, Interviewed by Helena and Mike Berry (November 2019).

shifting which you'd never know if you came here one time". Landmarks, such as particular stones, become significant as they change through the years. For example, the last rusted winch, which had been used by fishermen on the beach, was mentioned by many beach hut owners who were interviewed for the project. CD photographed the winch from 2010 - 2014, before it rusted away, documenting it's final years and the popular past-time of balancing stones on it, which is popular at the cove.



Today, Church Ope Cove continues to attract visitors to its landmarks like Rufus Castle and Pennsylvania Castle, as well as popular recreational pursuits of photography, angling, spearfishing, bird watching, paddle-boarding and swimming. As part of the South-West Coastal Path, it also attracts large number of walkers who stop at the cove on their way around the Island. As well as new buildings and huts on the beach, there is the caravan park at the top of the cliffs, which takes advantage of views over the bay. At the same time, the ruins of St Andrew's Church continue to cause distress for many local people due to the difficulty accessing this ancient landmark and its state of ruin. Due to the cove's overgrowth, many sites of historic interest continue to be inaccessible or hidden from sight, and many of its strange landmarks, like the old St Andrew's Well, continue to spark curiosity although their origins remain a mystery.