

1. Lympstone Through Time



Lympstone in 1799, by Reverend John Swete

Introduction

There have been people living in Lympstone since the Bronze Age, and through Roman and Saxon occupations. Some of the local buildings date back to the middle ages, with parts of the church and The Mill in Stone Lane, built in the 13th century.

With land and sea providing opportunities for work, Lympstone once had a thriving ship building trade, as well as fishing and whaling. As a young man Sir Walter Raleigh sailed out of Lympstone with his brothers. The arrival of the railway blighted our ship-building trade, and only one trawler works out of Lympstone today. Our traditional annual Furry Dance takes place in August, a tradition that dates back some 150 years.

Artists love to paint in Lympstone, with many gravitating to the waterfront with its distinctive Peters Tower (now maintained by the Landmark Trust) and the iconic sight of the washing hanging on the old fishing-net lines on the beach.

To find out more, scroll down.

This is one of a set of info points around the village.

For more information click [here](#).

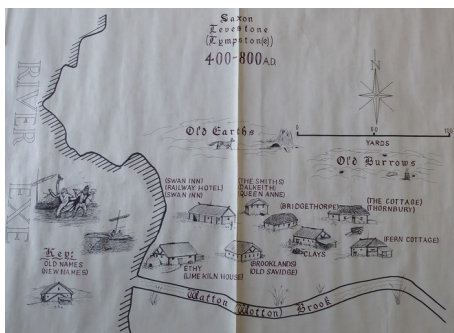
1. Lypstone Through Time



Lympstone Furry Dance August 2011. Photograph by Mary Turner, taken from Lympstone Station

Early Lympstone (Levenson) 2000-1100 BC

There have been people living in Lypstone at least since Bronze age times, and through the Roman and Saxon occupations. Lypstone lanes were a part of the 'Great Trackway' leading from Dorset to Cornwall: the 'Old Way' reached the West side of the River Exe at Starcross. There were people living here in the Bronze Age and a late Bronze Age sword found off Pole Sands by Lypstone fisherman J G Coventon is now held in Exeter Museum.



49-658 AD

The Celts, Early Britons, lived here undisturbed until the Roman Conquest. The Romans invaded Britain in 49AD, leaving by 399AD. There was a Roman road from Topsham to Exeter, which was used by the Romans as a port on the

River Exe, and a coin of Antonius of Philip I (244-249AD) found in a cottage garden west of Underhill farm in 1958, and coins of Gordianus Pius III (238-244AD) found in the Parish Church graveyard in 1879. In about 614AD, Saxons invaded East Devon and were in control of the area by 658AD.

1066 and all that

At the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066 Lympstone had a population of about 90 people and William the Conqueror gave Nutwell House (then Nothoelia) to the Breton family de Dinan. It was mentioned in the Domesday Book in 1086 and Levenson (Lympstone) was held by Richard, son of Count Gilbert, a Norman.

Middle Ages 13th - 15th century

The earliest documentary evidence of a Church dates from 1228, by which time 'Farleys' had been built in The Strand (which has smoke blackened rough beams – branches - in the roof space indicating its early Medieval origins). Sowden House (a farmhouse in Sowden Lane), 'Merrylands' (a medieval church glebe farm in Burgmann's Hill) and Lower Coombe Farm (Tedstone Lane) were already established. The Mill at the end of Stone Lane was first recorded on 1258. (See HP 5 & 6). The population had risen to about 110, until the Black Death arrived and halved the population by 1351.



Lympstone Church



The Mill



Merrylands

15th Century: Wars of the Roses

On November 19th 1455 there was a battle on Lympstone foreshore when the Yorkist Bonevilles of Shute (who then owned Lympstone Manor) rose to challenge The Earl of Devon, a Courtenay and a Lancastrian who had plundered and terrorised Devon. Lord Dynham helped the Earl of March (the future Edward IV) escape to France having hidden him in Nutwell Castle. In 1459 they escaped from Lympstone in a small boat, then transferred to a Balingier at Exmouth.



Civil war escape

The rivalry only ended with 3 generations of both families killed at the final Battle of Wakefield in 1460, and after the last Dynham died in 1501. Nutwell was sold to the Prideaux family in 1557.

Tudor times (16th century)

The Newfoundland Trade was already established by 1573 when the 'John of Lympstone' sank at the mouth of the river Exe on its return from Newfoundland. Local carpenters worked on the Pinnacle 'Gyfte', a ship which was subsequently fitted out in Exeter for fighting the Spanish Armada in 1588.

Piracy and Sir Walter Raleigh

The Raleigh brothers were 'privateers' (pirates) and in 1578 Walter joined his half-brothers when they sailed from Lymptstone. He was born in 1552 at Hayes Barton near East Budleigh, a few miles east of Lymptstone; he was knighted in 1585 by Queen Elizabeth I, and he died in 1618.

Lymptstone pirate John Nutt (c1623) terrorised Torbay. Piracy was rife and men were captured to become galley slaves with ransoms paid for their return.

During the civil war, the pro-royalist Prideaux family were Lords of Lymptstone, Nutwell and Woodbury Manors. Cannons were stationed on Cliff Field in Lymptstone, successfully keeping the Cromwellians from sailing up to Exeter.

17th Century

Gulliford Burial Ground, on Meeting Lane, dates back to the 17th century and is a Presbyterian and later Unitarian site from a time of religious upheaval, when dissenters risked imprisonment. The first chapel was built in 1691 and in 1774 a further plot of land was donated to extend the site for a second, larger chapel to be built to replace the original chapel which was now too small for the extra congregation. Burials at Gulliford include Worthington Brice, a merchant involved in the whaling industry; Margaret & Charles Baring, whose family were the banking dynasty from Courtlands; Brice Wakeford Lee of Ebford Barton, a Major-General in the Indian Army; and George Manson, aged just 25, a talented artist whose work hung in the Royal Academy.

18th Century: Ship building & Whaling (see HP 3)

25 vessels were built in Lymptstone between 1785 and 1813 – including brigantines, cutters and sloops. *Withalls and Staffords* built Newfoundland traders, *Basses* built for the navy, and *Worthington Brice* built ships and also started whaling, which took over from cod until the end of the 18th century. Brice died in 1787 and was buried in Gulliford Burial Ground (see HP 7).



Artist: Philip Hutchins Rogers (1794-1853)
'Low Tide at Lymptstone'

In 1721 Sir Thomas Putt, Lord of Lympstone, willed that all tenants of his Manor could buy their freehold. Soon after this in 1726 the name 'Lympstone' came into use.

19th Century

In 1801 the population of Lympstone was 883, and by the 1851 census had risen to 1107, and the village school opened in 1823. In 1833 a chimney fire in Quay Lane spread rapidly, destroying 58 houses dating from the medieval period, making 248 residents homeless. An appeal in the national press brought donations from across the country to help those affected.



By the 1860s prosperous villagers owned their ships and earned their living locally through inshore fishing and the oyster trade. The railway arrived in 1864, providing fast transport links (see HP 2).

Lympstone Station (postcard 1904)

By 1869 Lympstone was the largest fishing station of the port of Exeter. Newfoundland cod fishing continued, and there was trade with Spain, Holland and Europe.

Peters Tower (a landmark on the foreshore) was built in 1885. In 1861 The Swan Inn was renamed The Railway Inn to mark the arrival of the railway in that year. It was changed back in June 1961 by then landlord Bill Johnston, and it remains a central point in the village, and the focus of many activities.



Right: Railway Inn (now The Swan Inn)

In 1863/4 the parish Church was demolished except for its Tower (which dates from 1409) and rebuilt using sandstone quarried near Sowden Farm. The Methodist Church was built in 1883, followed by the Methodist School Hall in 1885. 1895 Fishermen petitioned for a new boat shelter, meanwhile whaling was coming to an end along with the century.

20th Century Lympstone

Fishing continued into the twentieth century with salmon fishing (pictured) and mussel farming prominent trades (see HP 3 & 6).

This photograph shows several local salmon fishermen (from left to right):

Harold Mitchell, Chris Squires, John Squires, and Sam Squires.



Lympstone's boat shelter was destroyed in a storm in 1912, and was finally rebuilt by villagers in 1936, around the same time as a new village hall was built above the parish church.

Rebuilding the boat shelter, 1936

World Wars

Lympstone lost 27 men in World War I (1914-18) and in 1940, during WWII, a Camp was built at Exton (now Lympstone Royal Marine Camp). Between 1942-44 American troops were to be found in the area. Between 1950-70 new housing estates were built using adjoining farm land, where many marine families were housed – the road names Gibraltar Road and Trafalgar Road reflect this connection.

Recent past

In 1958 the Sailing Club was built (mainly by its members).

1960 brought a severe flood in the village (see HP 4), and a sewerage system and flood relief works were completed in lower village between 1991-3. By this time only 5 shops remained in the village – a post office, a newsagents, a greengrocer, the Co-op, and a butcher/baker.

The present day

Lympstone's attractive foreshore with its distinctive landmark, Peters Tower, now has only 1 working fishing boat. Many leisure boats are craned from the harbour to the estuary each spring. The current population is circa 2000.



Lympstone foreshore, showing Peters Tower (painting by Audrey Doige).

Lympstone's traditional Furry Dance



Graham Wills leading the dance.

Lympstone's Furry Dance goes back over 150 years, and is thought to date from a time when Lympstone, with its harbour on the Exe estuary, was an important port for the fur trade.

The Furry Dance takes place on the first Saturday in August and has been led for over 50 years by Graham Wills, who retired from his duties during the Coronavirus pandemic in 2021.

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