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*Taken from a map held in Barnstaple Library (with the kind cooperation of Jamie Campbell, Librarian).
Again Burrow House is clearly marked.*

are several large squared and dressed sandstone blocks, too grand a material for a linhay. It is quite possible that these stones were originally part of Burrow House, and that Henry Williamson knew of its existence. Its setting, on the edge of the Burrows may well have given him the inspiration for *Wilderness*.

LUKE'S HUT

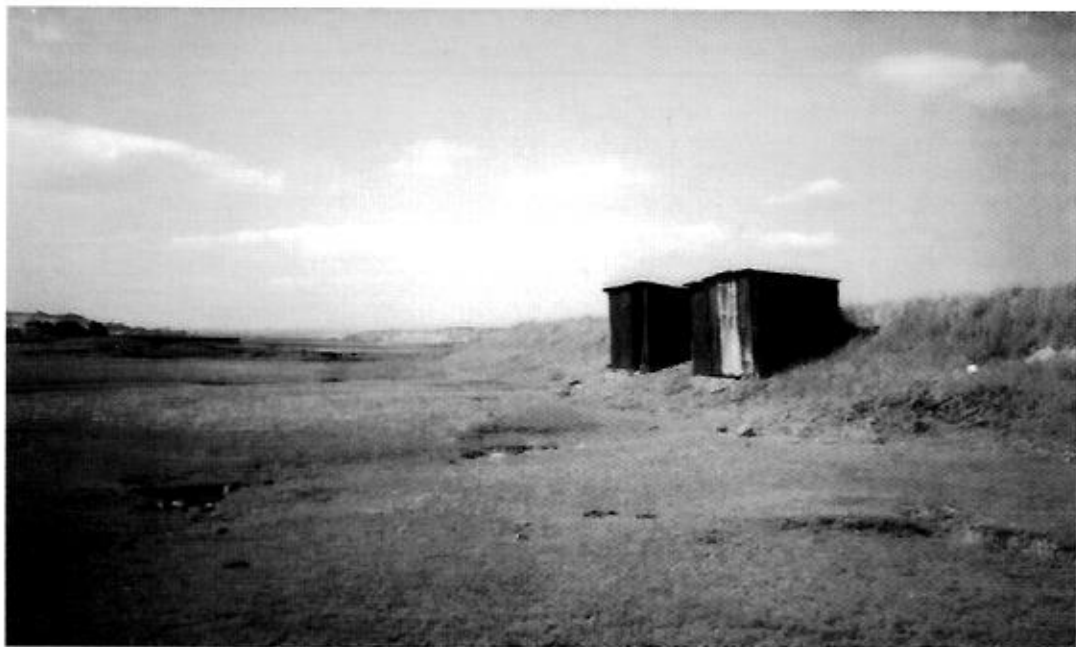
Willie Maddison visits Luke's Hut with Jean (Chapter 3) and on another occasion with Mary (Chapter 11). Willie and Mary climb the inner sea wall, built in 1815 to reclaim the Braunton marshes, 'and were immediately looking down on the harp shaped tract of marshland reclaimed from saltings when Mary's great grandfather had built the sea wall.' This area of marshland is known as Horsey Island, and was reclaimed in 1855 by Sir William Williams.

Prior to 1850, Horsey Island was in the ownership of the Bassett family and formed part of the Heanton estate. By that date it had changed hands and had passed to Mr William Williams, (later to become Sir William). He embarked on the next stage of reclamation, to enclose Horsey Island and Wrafton Marsh, completed around 1857. Much of the Great Sea Bank then became obsolete and now forms the inner sea wall that runs beside the toll road. Mr Williams was also responsible for a realignment of the River Caen at Velator to enable shipping to negotiate the river Caen more easily; this straightening of the river created Rams Horn duckpond. (*Tarka the Otter*).

Henry Williamson states that the reclamation was carried out by Mary's great grandfather; perhaps he assumed that it was the Bassetts who built the sea-wall, prior to Mr Williams taking over the Heanton estate, this would make more sense as it is the Bassetts and the Chichesters that feature largely in *The Pathway* and Henry Williamson, at times, substitutes one name for the other; for example, it was the Bassett family that owned Heanton Court, not a Chychester as Henry Williamson states.

Passing over the wooden footbridge that spans what once was the course of the river Caen prior to reclamation, Willie and Mary cross Horsey Island and climb up onto the outer sea wall. 'The estuary was half empty, the black weed tattered hurdles of the ruined salmon weir visible in the sand that silted them.' This refers to Horsey Weir, mentioned in *Tarka the Otter*, not a weir as such, but a massive fish trap, the posts of which are visible at times when the sandbanks are lowered by tides to reveal them.

'They walked on again' . . . 'Here the bend turned north, the bend in the harp' (known locally as Horsey Bend), 'following the grey mud slopes of the pill by which the sea went up to Speering Folliot'; another clue here to the whereabouts of Speering Folliot, the tides run up as far as Velator.



Luke's Hut

'Just below the wall, on the sett stones at the line of ordinary tides, stood a small cabin, or hut made by Luke of odd bits of timber found floating in the sea, or left by the tides along the wall'. They enter the hut, 'a narrow seat, made of a single plank nailed to low wooden stumps driven between the sett-stones, stretched across the hut which would have held four men sitting in comfort – the crew of a salmon boat.'

'Luke's Hut' is still to be found on Horsey Bend, together with another hut of more recent construction. The present owner of 'Luke's Hut', Sid Crick, a man well into his eighties, informed me that the hut was built about a hundred years ago by his father. These huts are known as the Fishermen's huts, and are, as Henry Williamson states, used as stores and shelter for crews of salmon netmen. Improvements have been made to 'Luke's Hut', by fixing corrugated iron to the wooden sides, and a door fitted to the front to make it more secure and weatherproof. The interior has not changed and is as Henry Williamson describes it, complete with plank seat and built with bits of driftwood.

The owner was, for many years a salmon fisherman, as was his father. As a boy he assisted his father in the operating of Horsey Weir in which he informed me, 'Us got some gill conger cee there'.

THE DUTCHMAN'S WRECK

Up to about forty years ago Henry Williamson's Dutchman's Wreck was a permanent feature of the Saunton Sands, the ribs protruding about twelve inches above the level of the beach; now it lies buried beneath its surface. On rare occasions, due to a combination of storm force winds and high tides the level of the sand is lowered and the Dutchman's Wreck reappears, the ribs standing just a few inches above the surface of the sands and forming the perfect outline of a vessel.

Other wrecks are revealed but it is only this wreck, the wreck nearest to Aery Point that matches Henry Williamson's description; 'The dark ribs of the wreck loomed out of the white fog of morning, like a skeleton of some extinct race of giants, buried east to west.' (chapter 12). Some years ago, two sections of the 'dark ribs' were sawn from the wreck by the father of a friend of mine. He was a keen woodturner and from the dark, almost black oakwood he made a pair of candlesticks.

Why did Henry Williamson call it the Dutchman's Wreck? Checking through lists of vessels wrecked on this shore reveal no Dutch vessel being wrecked or in trouble. The only possibility that I know of is based on the story of a Dutchman, The Duke of Ripperda who came ashore at Saunton in October 1728 from an Irish barque. He was a fugitive and had escaped from the castle of Segovia, was entertained by Mr Harris of Pickwell Manor before proceeding to Exeter, purpose unknown. This account can be found in more detail in several old editions of North Devon guidebooks, one being *The North Devon Coast* by Charles Harper (1908).



The Dutchman's Wreck.

CROW ISLAND

Crow Point was at one time known as Crow Island. Sometime around 1930 the channel that allowed vessels to by-pass Crow to the north at high tide, became silted up. An old seafaring friend of mine, Dillo Cowler, (now deceased), was aboard the last Braunton vessel to navigate this channel before it became impossible to do so. Crow Point became an island again in 1984, when the sea forced its way through the narrow neck to the north of the point. This gap was filled in with large rocks, some weighing several tons; it was feared that the seas would eventually erode the whole of Crow Point, (as they appear to be doing any way), and create a greater tidal surge, with the possibility of flooding to Barnstaple.

This breach can be seen in the photograph by Simon McBride in the illustrated *Tarka the Otter*, (1985 p. 93). Its title is 'The Sharshook', but this is in fact a photograph taken from Crow Point and looking towards the north with the sandy beach on the seaward side and the muddy 'Bight' on the right. I remember my son-in-law, (a stalwart HW member), a keen canoeist, coming through the breach on an incoming tide one summer evening in 1984, just as they did in days gone by, but in rather larger boats!

At the end of the last chapter when Willie Maddison has been found drowned, Julian Warbeck lights a fire on the beach at Crow. 'He smashed up one of the huts for that fire' Howard tells Mary.

These 'huts' were small weekend chalets similar to those that can be seen among the sandhills at Saunton and not particularly attractive. Over a period of several years the sand dunes of Crow Island were eroded by storms and tides and eventually the huts were abandoned and demolished by the encroaching seas. An uncle of mine was the unfortunate owner of one of these huts.

THE BRAUNTON LIGHTHOUSE

Henry Williamson mentions the lighthouse several times in *The Pathway* and in other books that he has written, *Devon Holiday* being one. Peter Lewis covers the history of this lighthouse thoroughly so I will try to clarify only one point. The Low Light that he mentions was mounted on rails and raised about thirty five feet above the level of the beach, on a sturdy timber framework. The channel through the Bideford Bar would at times alter its course, the movable light would be realigned with the new course and vessels lining up this lower light vertically with the main light, knew that it was safe to proceed through the channel and over the bar, provided the tide was at the right height. It was the advent of radar that heralded the beginning of the end of this lighthouse; only two years ago were the timbers of the lower light framework still in evidence, now they have completely disappeared, either buried by the sands or removed by the sea.

All that now remains of the Braunton lighthouse, (as it is referred to locally), after it was demolished in 1957, are the massive foundations of brick and concrete; these are now being undermined by the encroaching seas. A 'dig' around this site will often reveal copper nails; remains of oak shingles that once clothed the tower; thick glass that would have formed part of the light itself and many other odds and ends; a sad end to a most unusual and interesting lighthouse.



Braunton Lighthouse

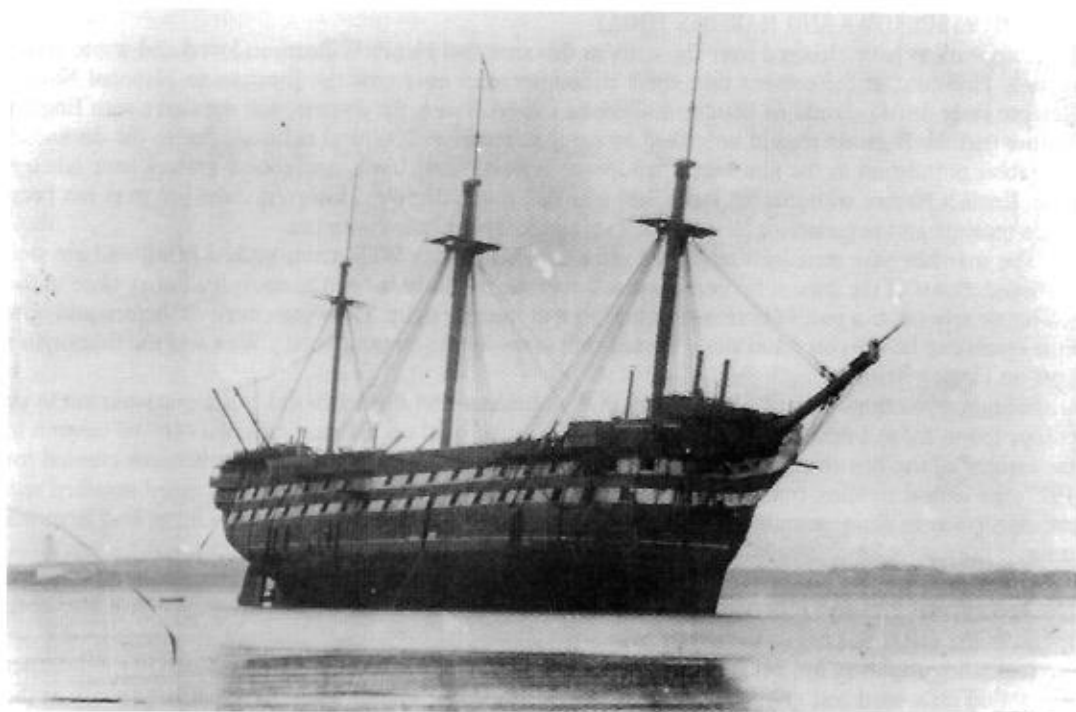
APPLEDORE AND THE REVENGE

In Chapter 10 of *The Pathway*, Mr Chychester comes into the kitchen of Wildernesse and asks first Mary and then Willie, if they will be attending the otter hunt. They both say they would like to go. After crossing the estuary Willie and Diana are left behind in Appledore because of lack of space in Howard's car. They decide to go for a walk. Willie says he would like to 'see over that old wooden battleship they're breaking up round the corner'.

They commence walking and eventually come to 'the end of the semicircular village; to low sandy cliffs above a stony beach where wooden hulks rested, and baulks of old timber were tied together and moored by rusty steel cables. Beyond the sea was lapping the lower timbers of the dismasted wooden battleship *Revenge*, which with portholes and brown poop and projecting stump of bowsprit, lay like the body of a gigantic cockchafer on the flat Skern mud'. This is all based on fact. The *Revenge* did indeed rest there. She was broken up by the shipbuilding firm of J. Hinks of Appledore in 1924. Alan Hinks who inherited the shipyard from his father informed me that his uncle, an associate of the firm was involved with the buying and breaking up of old vessels, the timber and fittings being sold to the general public. Although the *Revenge* was broken up before Alan was born, her name and the manner in which she ended her days has been handed down from his father. When this once grand and historic ship entered the Taw and Torridge estuary she caused quite a stir among the local people. Before she was broken up, the public were invited to 'see over' her for a small entrance fee. The proceeds were donated to the Bideford Hospital. With teak-wood salvaged from the ship, Alan's father made himself some furniture which is still in use today. According to Alan, remains of the *Revenge* can still be found in and around Appledore in the form of gateposts, sheds etc.

It is believed locally that this ship is the original *Revenge*, a seventy four gun ship of the line which fought at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. She beat off a large number of Spaniards who tried to board her on her port side and battled with a French two decker ship on her starboard side at the same time. Her captain, Robert Moorsom was wounded and received a Lloyds Patriotic Fund sword for gallantry. These swords were awarded to officers and men of the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic wars. However, looking at photographs of this ship very carefully, I discovered a major discrepancy in her shape that made me suspect this story. There is a gap on the hull where one would find a propeller in a steamship. Further research revealed that this ship was not the original *Revenge* but a later ship actually built in 1859 at the time of transition between sail and steam. This *Revenge* was the flagship of the Channel Fleet. Later her name was changed to *Empress* and she ended her days on the Clyde in 1923, where she was bought up (obviously with the engine and propeller already removed) by Hinks, taken to Appledore and broken up as related in 1924.

In Anne Williamson's book, *Tarka and the Last Romantic*, she mentions the following; 'Henry had had ever since the 1920s, some huge wooden (teak) stanchions, that he said had once been part of an Elizabethan battleship, that he had bought at one of the many auctions he attended in those early days. He had always planned to incorporate them in the house', (at Ox's Cross) (p.326). Some of these teak stanchions were indeed incorporated. Those that weren't used were left outside the house under a sheet of corrugated iron. I saw these timbers in 1982 whilst working at Ox's Cross, restoring the Writing Hut together with my son. When the house at Ox's Cross was sold in 1984, the estate agents details mentioned 'teak posts, said to have come from Nelsons flagship!' This is hardly possible as *Victory* still exists, although it does have teak stanchions very similar to those at Ox's Cross. I believe it can be reasonably assumed that these stanchions, that were painted black and white, even though they were teak, came from this *Revenge*. There was, until recently at Rosemoor House Torrington (now a Royal Horticultural Society property and garden), a thatched gazebo built with teak posts of the same design as those at Ox's Cross, bought at an auction of the wood and effects from the Appledore *Revenge*.



THE APPLIEDORE REVENGE.

Braunton lighthouse can be seen across the estuary (bottom left corner of top photo).

The Revenge was built in 1859 and broken up in 1924. She used a mixture of steam and sail power; the funnel lay flat when not in use.

The topmasts and part of the bowsprit have been removed and replaced with what looks like radio masts. Perhaps this was done when she became a training ship moored on the Clyde.

Her length was 244 feet, weight 3318 tons, top speed 11½ knots. The Revenge carried 91 guns, and was the flagship of the Channel Fleet.



BRAUNTON BURROWS AND MARSHES TODAY

Little appears to have changed over the years in this area that Henry Williamson loved and wrote about so well. However, at the present time there is disagreement over how the Burrows (a National Nature Reserve since 1964) should be managed. Christie Estates Trust, the owners, will not agree with English Nature that the Burrows should be grazed by cattle to retain its botanical richness; due to the decline of the rabbit population in the nineteen fifties, scrub willow, silver birch, and coarse grasses have taken a hold. English Nature withdrew its status last year due to the dispute. However, some progress has been made recently and negotiations have opened up again. The debate continues.

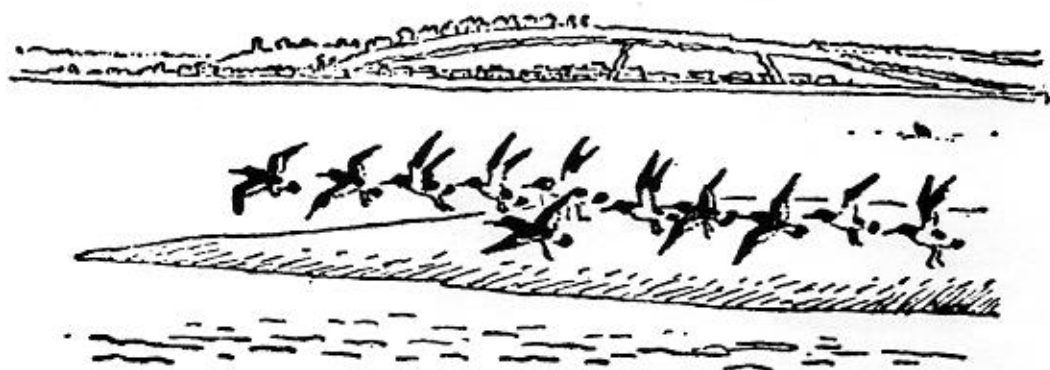
The marshes have remained much the same as when Henry Williamson walked them, and are well managed. Some of the linhays that are scattered over the marsh have been re-roofed; a linhay close to the toll house is home to a pair of barn owls, often seen at 'dimmit light'. Lapwings, curlews, herons and now little egrets can be seen on walks along the sea wall to the White House, Horsey Weir and the fisherman's huts on Horsey Bend.

Salmon no longer come into the estuary in the numbers that they once did. An inquiry has yet to be completed to try and decide how, hopefully, stocks can be built up. Salmon netmen can still be seen in the estuary of the two rivers, but not in the numbers there once were; fourteen net licences granted for 1997, the season running from 1 April to 31 August. The Environment Agency has asked netmen and rod fishermen to show restraint to help conserve this year's fish stocks of spring salmon and large sea trout.

Otters are showing an increase and signs of these elusive animals are found around the 'Ramshorn Duckpond', the Pill, and Pills Mouth, where the river Caen enters the river Taw; signs have also been found in the upper reaches of the river Caen.

Increasing numbers are being found dead along Devon roads, close to rivers. Recently a dead otter was found on a road just above Shallowford on the Fortescue Estate. Lady Arran in her speech at the unveiling ceremony of the plaque at Baggy last October mentioned three otters, seen only a week before on the river Bray, the river that runs through the Fortescue Estate.

The Burrows and Marshes are still considered by many, myself included, to be a special place and well worth the efforts being made to preserve their natural beauty. I am certain, if Henry Williamson and his friend Dr Eliston Wright were with us today their voices would be heard in the debate.



Sketch by C.F. Timmichliffe taken from Tarka the Otter.

