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Book Reviews

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Michael Tearce, Bob Kirby, Bob and Anthony Burt, *A History of East-the-Water, Bideford* (Bideford: Peterhouse Press, 2021), 154 pp., b & w and colour illustrations. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-9463122-0-7. £10.00.

This book is the culmination of many years work by the Way of the Wharves charity, whose objective is to research and promote the maritime history of the Torridge Estuary and the wharves at East-the-Water, Bideford, in North Devon. The narrative begins with an explanation of the work of the project and the aims of the book, which, the authors state,

concentrates on the important strands that make up the history of the local community: timber, emigration, shipbuilding, tobacco and pottery, coal mining and gravel extraction, fisheries, agriculture, energy and enterprise as well as the changes brought about by steamships and railways.

The introduction sets the scene, looking at East-the-Water in its geographical context and discussing the impact of its location on the development and history of the settlement. Shipbuilding, trade, predominantly with the Iberian peninsula and privateering are mentioned, as well as the importance of the tobacco, pottery and fishing industries and the relationship with the agricultural hinterland. This is followed by a short section describing the development of the wharves and the commercial activities that took place there.

A substantial chapter, 'Shamwickshire, East-the-Water', sets out the chronological framework for what follows. This begins with the early

history and considers the debate regarding a possible Roman routeway. Possible origins for Shamwickshire, the popular name for East-the-Water, are considered. The impact of war on the community, from the Battle of Northam in 1069, through the English Civil War and the Napoleonic wars to the twentieth century world wars, with the establishment of a munitions factory and the arrival of the American servicemen, is outlined. The school, churches, the many inns and the Royal Hotel, all get a mention. The reader also learns of the escapades of Richard Annesley of Torridge House.

The remaining chapters take a thematic approach, each focussing on an aspect of the economic activity of the wharves. Chapter 4 deals with the timber trade and its links with emigration, predominantly to Prince Edward Island in Canada. The chapter on shipbuilding and ships is a longer one, highlighting the significance of this industry. A useful table lists the East-the-Water shipyards, with their dates and the names of their occupants. Good use is also made of an annotated map, locating the yards.

Tobacco, clay and pottery are covered in Chapter 6. This may not seem a likely combination until it is explained that the local ball clay was ideal for the production of clay pipes. The popularity of local sgraffito ware and other pottery, much of which was exported to North America, is also described. The section on coal, sand and gravel gives details of the culm mining and the production of 'Bideford Black', as well as sand dredging for the building trade and for the production of fertilizer.

Although much of the book, rightly, centres on the activities along the wharves, land links are not overlooked and there is a chapter dedicated to roads and bridges. The theme of transport links continues and moves forward in time with a discussion of the impact of the advent of steam ships and the railway.

There is evidence of fisheries in Bideford from the eleventh century and Chapter 10 describes salmon fishing and the lucrative Newfoundland cod trade, as well as local fishing. Land-based activities are examined in a chapter entitled 'Agriculture and fertilisers, energy and enterprise'. The book concludes with reflections on the future of the area.

The book is enhanced by black and white and colour illustrations, as well as line drawings by Lou Boulter. There are recommendations for further reading, a list of references and a brief index. Appendices provide information about the listed buildings in the area, extracts from trade directories, a list of local shipbuilders and reproduce the 'Ode to Shamwickshire.'

The authors have succeeded in their aim to tell the story of the wharves at East-the-Water, from a variety of perspectives. Research is ongoing but this book brings together what has been learned so far in a readable and attractively produced volume. It will be an asset to anyone with an interest in East-the-Water and the economic history of the Torridge estuary.