

Heritage: Around & About Blagdon's Meadow

Fording the River
For a shallow gully where a river may be expected.

There were once two roads across the Laita, of Point Quay and probably given its name to the area of Plymouth known as Elford. Another ford crossed from near Point Quay to Chelston Point.

Ship and Boats
Many hundreds of years ago cargo ships sailed past here as far inland as Plymouth, but the river was blocked by rocks.

Two-wheeled sailing ships continued to trade to Europe. Afterwards, some sailing barges could 'hoop' their masts to sail under the bridge, otherwise only smaller boats could pass upstream. Between about 1875 and 1900, the Laita was used for a variety of low level, collecting sand washed down from local china clay works.

Since the 1820s, the Laita has mainly been used for leisure. For a time, Jane Seabig Club was based at Arnold's Point. The Plymouth Amateur Rowing Club was founded in 1882. The Laita was used for the Laita in 1941. Nowadays, speedboats, water-skiing and jet-ski shows the river with the Rowing Club.



From Plymouth to the Laita, 1822
Viewed from the Laita, 1822
Viewed from the Laita, 1822
Viewed from the Laita, 1822

Blagdon's Meadow
Behind you, the simple post and rail fence and Embankment Road mark the line of a man-made waterfront called The Embankment, built in 1802. This was where the tide reached until the 1970s - in the years before Blagdon's Meadow existed.

Blagdon's Meadow is part of a large triangular plot of land reclaimed from the river in the early 1970s, which included the G-seece boatyard and storage area to the south. An old railway embankment, built in the 1890s, forms the southern boundary. The natural headland at Arnold's Point and Point Quay marks the northern end of the site.



Chelston Meadow, 1920
Viewed from the Laita, 1920
Viewed from the Laita, 1920

Chelston Meadow

In 1807, Lord Brougham of Saltram obtained permission to redevelop Chelston Creek, now known as Chelston. By building an embankment called the 'Isle', a large field was enclosed and drained for use as agricultural land.

The field, at Chelston Meadow, was used for horsekeeping and from 1828 and about 1900, it was home to the annual Plymouth, Stonehouse & Devonport Races. In the mid 1890s, the Meadow was found largely unused, and it was an 18th century field and part of a wood called 'Laita'. Landfill operations continued until 2008, covering most of the site and dramatically changing the landscape. Chelston is still a local outdoor-cycling centre. The buildings include an outdoor centre - the Greenhouse - and a water sports station.

RIVER PLYM The Laita



Laita Bridge, from the Laita, 1870
Viewed from the Laita, 1870
Viewed from the Laita, 1870

Laita Bridge

The ideal spot to build a bridge was the river narrow, to 50 feet (15m), between Point Quay and Poughill Point.

The first bridge was a hand-worked ferry called the Laita Ferry Bridge. It was a small wooden version of a modern day floating bridge or chain ferry, but the one at Poughill.

An elegant five-arched 'Iron Bridge' at the modern road bridge replaced it in 1862. The railway bridge across the river was in use by 1867 and the last spans collapsed in the 1950s.



The Laita Ferry, the Laita Ferry Bridge
Viewed from the Laita, 1870
Viewed from the Laita, 1870

Railways to Plymouth

In the mid 1820s the two-steam Plymouth & Devonport Railway (PDR) Plymouth near Laita Bridge. The railway made use of the new level approach provided and protected by the Embankment.

After 1803, the South Devon, later the Great Western, Railway joined some of the PDR routes. The London & South Western Railway followed in 1876, with a line which ran to Plymouth Ferry.

By the late 1850s three branch line railways ran east towards the River, crossing Embankment Road over two separate bridges. Only the line to the Old Railway Bridge remains in use. Trains still cross the Old Railway Bridge.



The Old Railway Bridge, 1870
Viewed from the Laita, 1870
Viewed from the Laita, 1870



Detail from Plymouth Sound, Harbours and Canals, 1779
Viewed from the Laita, 1779
Viewed from the Laita, 1779

The Laita

You are overlooking the Laita - a part of the estuary of the River Plym that stretches from the river bridges to your right, upstream towards the ASD dual carriageway.

The Laita was once wider, with tidal bays and creeks on both sides. For example, the entrance to Tidal Bay was behind you. The land on which you are standing has also been reclaimed from the river.

The medieval road to Plymouth from the east crossed the River Plym to the north of here, at Longbridge. If you wanted to cross the Plym nearer to Plymouth before 1800, the only alternatives were to ford the river at low tide or take a small rowing ferry.

Between 1802 and 1810 the building of artificial embankments reshaped the shores of the Laita and Chelston Creek. New and better roads and a new bridge crossing followed.

The old road to Plymouth ran along the northern shore of Lipton Lake and then climbed Lipton Hill before descending to Plymouth's historic Sutton Harbour. The Embankment provided a level bypass to Plymouth. The Road at Chelston gave the owners of Saltram House a new carriage drive.

Signs for the road on Laita's banks
Accept the weaved horses' tracks.
Verses written for toll-road opening, 1809

Heritage: Around & About Blagdon's Meadow
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