

# Churchtown Farm

## NATURE RESERVE



[www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk)

### About the nature reserve

Churchtown Farm Community Nature Reserve lies in a strategic position on the edge of Saltash with spectacular views over the scenic waterways that connect Plymouth and the Tamar Valley to the sea. It is of great wildlife, heritage and amenity value to visitors from the local area and beyond.

The 61 hectares (over 150 acres) of hay meadows, arable fields, mature hedges, woodland, wetland, scrub, rocky shoreline and mudflats are steeped in history. Prehistoric settlers, medieval aristocracy, the church, farming, seafaring, quarrying, mining, and railway engineering have all left their mark.

Today, this site continues to serve the community: people are able to stretch their legs, breathe the bracing sea air, look at the views, relax, and enjoy being in touch with the natural world.

Churchtown Farm Community Nature Reserve is owned by the Antony Estate and leased by Cornwall Wildlife Trust, who manage the land for wildlife, helped by local volunteers.

#### Routes and guidelines

The extensive network of footpaths includes two Public Rights of Way and a number of permissive paths, granted by the Antony Estate.

Bicycles, vehicles, camping, littering, and the lighting of fires are strictly prohibited on this nature reserve.

#### Dog walking

This is a popular place for dog walking. With wildlife, livestock and other visitors in mind, please keep dogs under close control. Please refer to the map for details.

Dog walkers have restricted access to some areas where wildlife is vulnerable, particularly during nesting season. Ground-nesting birds such as the skylark, whose population has crashed, are prone to tragic losses of eggs and chicks if disturbed. (Watch skylarks rising vertically into the air and hovering at a great height during their song flight.)

#### The Friends of Churchtown Farm Community Nature Reserve

The Friends group was established in 2001 to support the management and development of the nature reserve. The Friends warden the site and organise an annual programme of events including monthly guided walks and beach cleans. The group provides a valuable point of contact within the local community, and its members encourage others to enjoy the nature reserve as much as they do.

 Find 'Churchtown Farm Friends' on Facebook or visit the website: [www.churchtownfarm.saltash.website](http://www.churchtownfarm.saltash.website)

If you would like to become a member of the Friends of Churchtown Farm Community Nature Reserve, download a subscription form from the website.



### How to find the site

**Main entrance:** Wearde Road, Saltash, PL12 4AS  
**What3words:** photos.cats.reclusive

**On foot:** From Saltash town centre head west up Fore Street. At the roundabout take the second exit onto St. Stephens Road. Stay on this road until you reach a left-hand turn onto Wearde Road. You will find the main entrance to Churchtown Farm 250m on the right.

**By rail:** Saltash railway station is approximately one mile (a 25 minute leisurely walk) from the reserve. From the station turn left onto Albert Road and then right onto Station Road. At the junction turn left onto Lower Fore Street and then follow the instructions above.

**By bus:** Stagecoach bus No.2, Mount Batten-Saltash, stops at the top of Wearde Road.

**By car:** There is limited parking on Wearde Road opposite the reserve entrance.

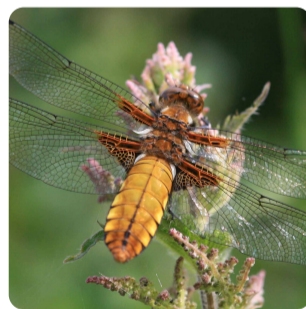


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### Cornwall Wildlife Trust

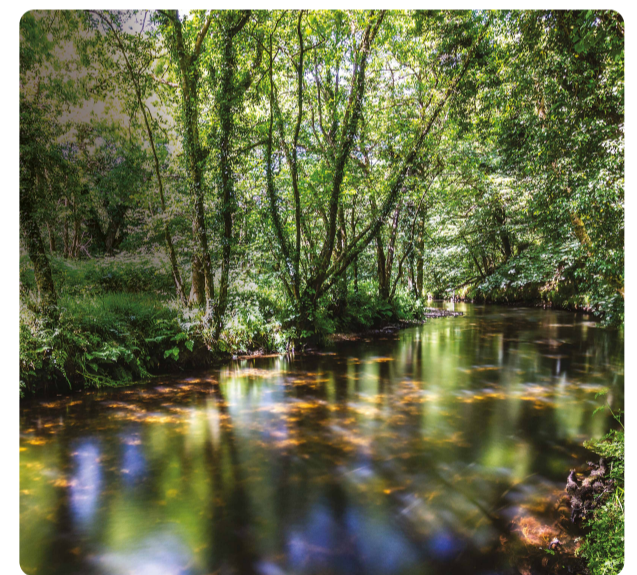


Cornwall Wildlife Trust is one of 46 Wildlife Trusts working across the UK. With the invaluable support of volunteers, members, and corporate supporters, Cornwall Wildlife Trust manages over 57 nature reserves, including an island, for wildlife and people in Cornwall. The Trust works with a variety of organisations and landowners to protect and connect wildlife sites across the county and inspire local communities and young people to care for wildlife where they live.



#### What we do

- We look after 5,500 acres of land across Cornwall, protecting and creating wildlife havens that are open to all, helping people connect with nature
- We are supported by volunteers, young people, and dedicated communities who are helping us to create new habitats, educate others and restore wild places – a lasting legacy that makes a difference right now but also long into the future
- We are on the ground vaccinating badgers, recording marine life, planting thousands of trees and seeds, and bringing beavers back to Cornwall
- We are working with hundreds of farmers, fishers, and Cornish businesses to work together in ways that help wildlife to thrive
- We speak up, nationally and locally, for wildlife; urging leaders, politicians, and partners to put nature's recovery front and centre in their decision making.



#### Support our work

Visit our website at [cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk) to support our work in the following ways:

- Join our email newsletter to stay up to date with news, actions and events
- Donate to support our work on specific projects or where there is the greatest need
- Become a volunteer to have a direct, hands-on impact for wildlife.

#### Become a member

Join over 17,000 wildlife enthusiasts who support our work with a monthly contribution and receive three issues of Cornwall Wildlife Trust's magazine, Wild Cornwall, each year. Join today and receive the most recent edition along with our Guide to Nature Reserves.



## Exploring the site

As shown on the map, there are three established trail routes to enjoy at Churchtown Farm:

- ◆◆◆◆ Lynher View Walk (wheelchair accessible)
- ▽▽▽▽ Sparrowhawk Trail (easy)
- Curlew Trail (moderate)

Across the reserve, visual reminders of its industrial importance in years gone by can still be found today, including:

### Transport by river

For 200 years, sailing barges carried 'dock dung' – the horse-manure-rich sweepings from the streets of Plymouth Dock (Devonport) – to small quays, for spreading on the land. Lost objects swept up with the dung can still be found. 'Point Field' refers to 'Passage Point', where the Antony Ferry ran from medieval times until 1952.

### Quarrying

Towards the end of the 19th century, quarrying increased in the valley. Volcanic dolerite was mined from local sites including Lowhill Quarry as demand for roadstone increased. The quarries had tramways leading to the quays, where stone was loaded onto sailing ships and barges.

### Transport by rail

The Cornwall Railway opened in 1859, running through Higher Hill, Valley Park and Chall Park fields, and over the mouth of Forder Creek on a timber-trestle viaduct designed by Brunel. Some of its masonry supports still stand at the edge of Chall Park. In 1880 the Great Western Railway took over, creating the current double-track route, with a stone and brick viaduct still in use today.

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### RESTRICTIONS

- Please keep dogs on leads at all times
- Please keep dogs on leads between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 30<sup>th</sup> September

## History of Churchtown Farm

The Churchtown Farm you see today has been shaped by both geological processes and humans over the millennia. Volcanic activity 360 million years ago disgorged the dolerite rock found in Lowhill Quarry. The Tamar Valley itself was formed during the last ice age and has a long history of human habitation. Flints and tools found on the reserve date back to the hunter-gatherers of the Mesolithic (10,000 to 4,000 BCE), farmers of the Neolithic (onwards to 2,400 BCE) and the Bronze Age (to 600 BCE).

## The Church and farming

In the 11th century William the Conqueror ordered the construction of Trematon Castle, which became the new administrative centre of the former Trematon manor. Robert, Count of Mortain (of Launceston Castle), gave Trematon Castle and its manors to his follower, Reginald de Valletort, who may have founded a church on the hill across the valley to the east of the castle, dedicated to St Stephen.

Churchtown Farm was attached to the church and divided into tenant farms, with several fields named after past tenants. From the late 1800s much of the land was divided into two freehold estates – Sanctuary Manor and Wearde Farm – these form most of the current nature reserve, which is now owned by the Antony Estate and leased to Cornwall Wildlife Trust.

## Churchtown Farm in the 21st century

Today, Churchtown Farm is managed for its wildlife. The ancient hedges are trimmed on two or three-year rotations, with only one side cut in any year. Wide and bushy, the hedges provide food, shelter and nesting sites.

The arable fields – Higher South Ground and Valley Park – are sown with a seed mix for farmland birds. Without herbicides and pesticides, once-common 'arable weeds' are able to survive (look for the tiny



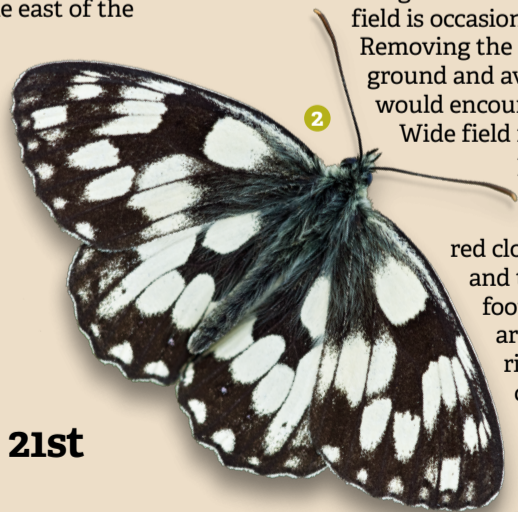
red flowers of scarlet pimpernel **1** and the tiny white flowers of corn spurrey). Birds flock to the fields – colourful chaffinches, bullfinches, greenfinches, goldfinches, linnets, and occasional bramblings can be seen enjoying their winter seed banquet.

Traditional hay meadows stand on permanent grassland – now a rare sight. Hay is cut late in the season to allow an array of wild plants to flower and set seed amongst the tall grasses. The steep Quay Park field is occasionally scythed and raked by hand. Removing the hay enables seeds to reach the ground and avoids soil enrichment, which would encourage lush growth to take over.

Wide field margins are cut on long rotations, protecting wild flowers and their pollinators. In late spring and summer, look for the pink of red clover and cut-leaved crane's-bill, and the yellow and orange of bird's-foot trefoil. Butterflies you'll see around the field edges include the ringlet, meadow brown, gatekeeper, comma, marbled white **2** and common blue.

Pasture fields are summer grazed. In damp areas in the valley bottoms fed by springs, wetland plants can grow and insects thrive, hunted by swooping swallows in summer. Cattle grazing leads to trampling and poaching of the ground, giving long-hidden seeds space to grow.

Some areas of woodland and scrub are left to nature, while other scrub areas are cut annually or on a five-year rotation. The woodland edge habitats offer wildlife the benefits of both shelter and sunlight, so they buzz, rustle and whirr with life.



## A farm within the estuary

From Sandacre Bay, or from Churchtown Farm's quiet hillsides overlooking the Tamar, you can see the massed buildings of Plymouth and Devonport Dockyard in the distance – a hub of activity beside the estuary as the river meets the sea at Plymouth Sound.

Across the River Lynher to the south lie the magnificent grounds of the 18th century Antony House, inland from HMS Raleigh's military training facility at Jupiter Point. Further along the Lynher, across from the Antony Estate, stands another grand manor house: Ince Castle, built in the mid-17th century. A viaduct crosses Forder Creek by Forder Lake Mill Pond, and across the creek from Churchtown Farm, the medieval crenellated keep of Trematon Castle stands on a mound surrounded by trees and colourful gardens.

In the estuary **3**, salt sea water meets fresh river water carrying rich sediments that form mudflats. Beneath the shiny brown surface, the mudflats are full of life: worms of many sizes, shrimps, and bivalve molluscs such as peppery furrow shell and cockles feed on nutrients in the silt. In winter, bring your binoculars to view long-billed wading birds such as curlew, redshank, and greenshank probing for food at low tide. The estuary mud is full of dumped and sunken ships too, one of the most visible being the pinnacle from a World War II warship, in Sand Acre Bay.



Rock and shingle along the shoreline are host to coastal plants such as sea beet, thrift (sea pink), and the daisy-like sea mayweed. At low tide you will find bladderwrack – a brown, branching seaweed with air pockets – covering the rocks, and shore crabs hiding in rockpools. You might even notice signs of otters along the shoreline.