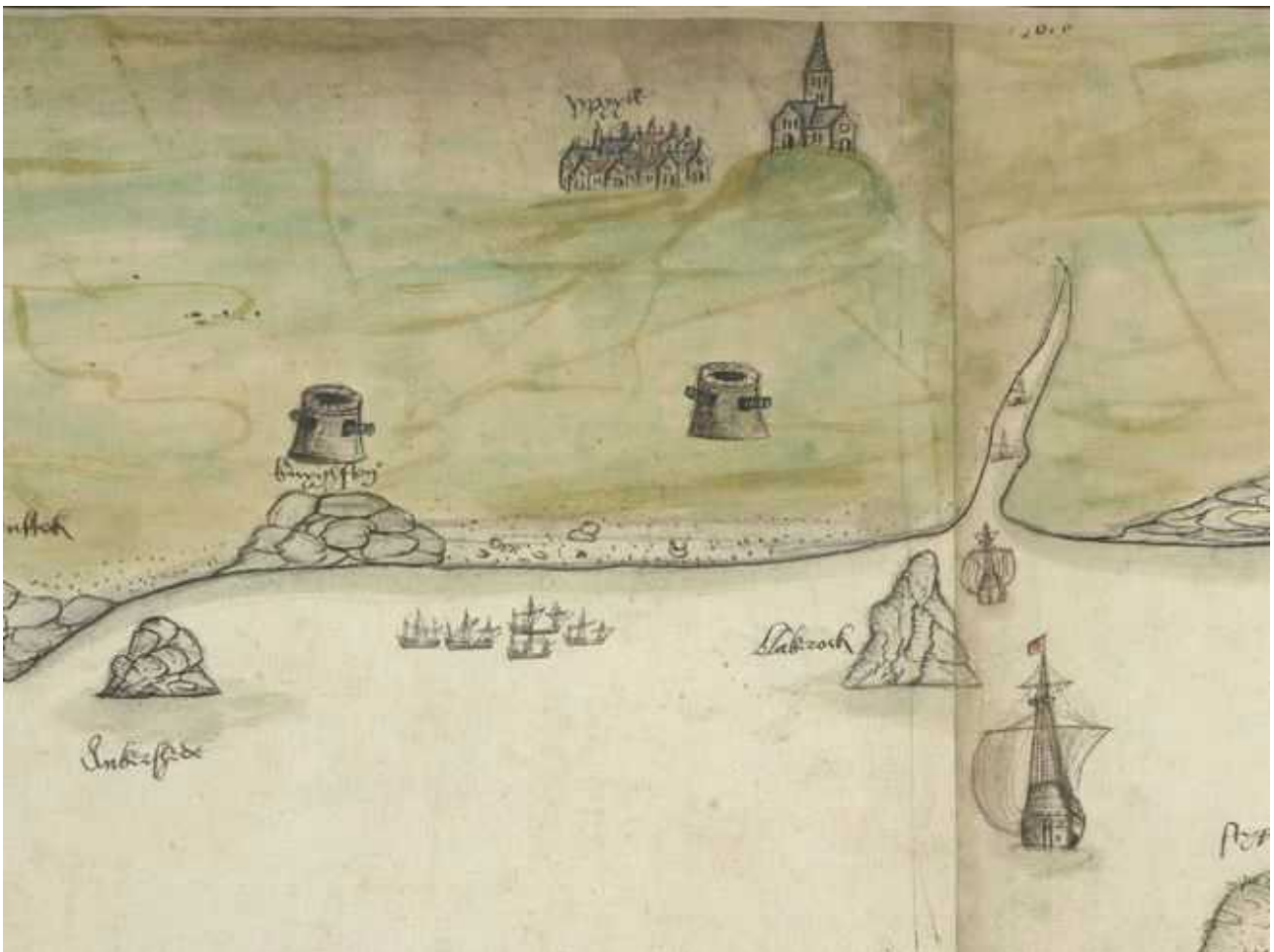


YCCART 2019/Y19

The Coste of England uppon Severne 1539

YATTON, CONGRESBURY, CLAVERHAM AND CLEEVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL
RESEARCH TEAM (YCCART)

General Editor: Vince Russett



'Uphyll', 'Ankerhede' and 'Blakrock': Weston-super-Mare in 1539 from the sea

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Abstract

The coast of North Somerset and Somerset was a cause for concern during the 16th century. Any military intervention by a foreign power which interrupted the trade of the internationally important port of Bristol was to be avoided at all costs. The international situation seemed to make an invasion possible. This 'view from the sea' recorded coastal defences and seamarks between Portishead and Porlock Weir, but whether this was recording existing sites, or planning for creating them, is not clear from context. It is firmly suggested that they were never built.

Acknowledgements

To the British Library for putting this wonderful document on line for free access

Introduction

Yatton, Congresbury, Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team (YCCART) is one of a number of Community Archaeology teams across northern Somerset, formerly supported by the North Somerset Council Development Management Team.

Our objective is to undertake archaeological fieldwork to enable a better understanding and management of the heritage of the area while recording and publishing the activities and locations of the research carried out.

Site location



Fig 1: The coast of England upon Severn

The map depicts a line of coast from Portishead in the north-east, to Porlock Weir in the west, a distance by land of c 85km (53 miles; 46 nautical miles). This now lies in the Local Authority areas of North Somerset, Sedgemoor, West Somerset and Exmoor National Park. This report details the coast of North Somerset: the Somerset coast will be published elsewhere.

Land use and geology

The coast of North Somerset alternates between hard stone geology (principally Carboniferous Limestones) to drift alluvial geologies, now protected by sea defences. Most of the coast is accessible to the public, but some areas are quite dangerous. If visiting the North Somerset coast, check on conditions (including tide times) and accessibility beforehand.

Historical & archaeological context of the map

The map is today in the British Library, and can be seen on-line at <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery>.

It is described there as 'The Coste of England uppon Severne, being the whole north coast of Somersetshire; with the forts erected thereon'. The makers name is unknown.

The map is 187.5cm wide, and 35cm long, in ink and tempura on parchment. The BL comments that this was probably a map of intended fortifications, drawn up in 1539 (despite the title including the words 'the forts *erected* thereon'). It adds that this was probably due to the peace signed the previous year between Francis I of France and Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain. Charles V's daughter, Catherine of Aragon, was being divorced by Henry, and England and France were ancient enemies, and invasion was thus thought possible.

So in 1539, Thomas Cromwell ordered certain '*..sadde and expert men of every shire in Inglad beyng nere the see..to viewe all the places alongest the secost wher any daunger of invasions ys like to be and to certifie the sayd daungers and also best advises for the fortificacion thereof..*'

(<https://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/henryviii/militmap/coastdef/index.html>)

The smaller blockhouses, such as those shown on our map do survive in places, such as Calshot Castle, near Beaulieu, and are generally cylindrical three storey buildings. Obviously, the south coast took precedence, and it is doubtful if any marked on the Severn map were built.

The peace treaty of 1546 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Device_Forts) ended the crisis.

It's history is obscure subsequently, but at some point it became part of the Cottonian collections, and is now housed in the British Library at Kew.

The map by section

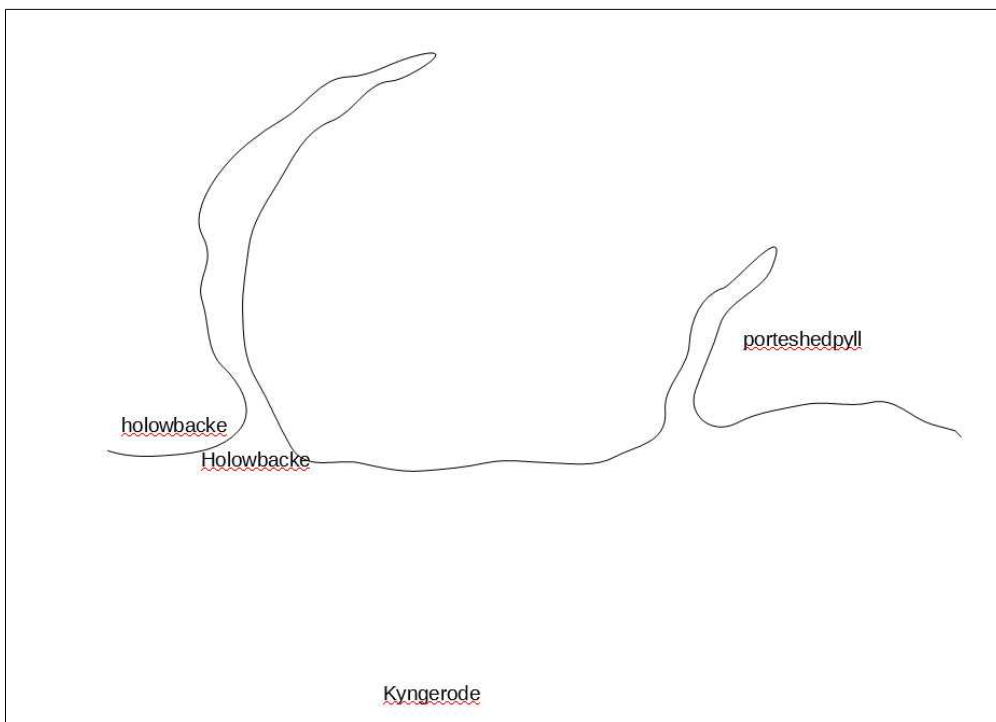
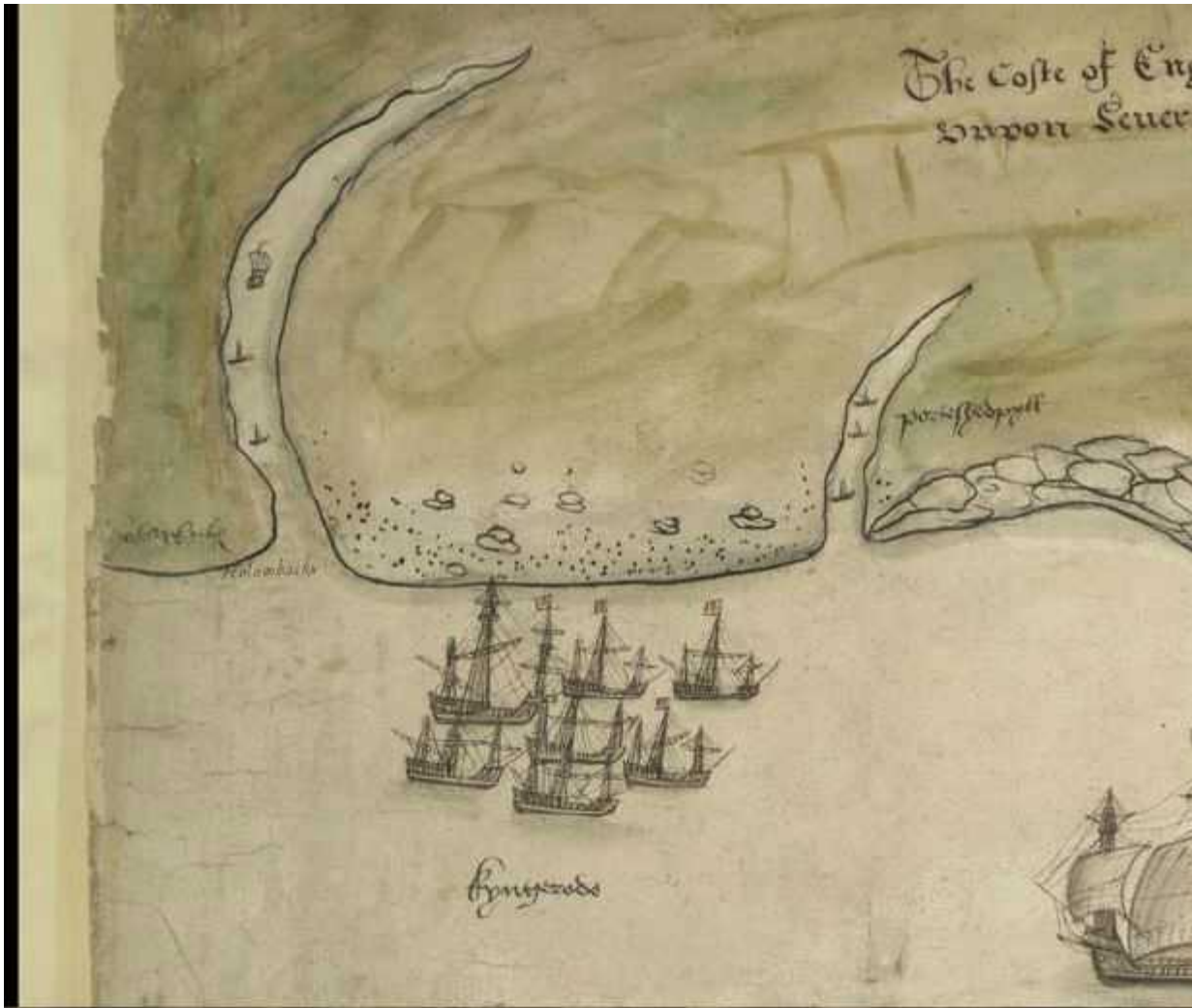


Fig 1: The coast from Avonmouth to Portishead

The first section of the map covers the coast from what is now Avonmouth to about half way along the low cliffs at Eastwood, Portishead. In the foreground are a group of ships waiting for favourable tides to run up the river Avon (the left estuary) to Bristol. This area was known as King Road. The name 'Holowbacke' at the mouth of the Avon probably reflects the fact that the river formerly ran further to the west than today, with an island (Dungball Island) then on the Bristol side of the river, but now joined to the Somerset side. Later engineering of Avonmouth and then Portbury Docks has more or less obliterated this.

The coast between the Avon and 'portshedpyll' is shown as low-lying: beyond the 'pyll' the cliffs of Eastwood are depicted as a mass of rocks.

Portshedpyll was the old name for the tidal pill obliterated by the building of Portishead Dock: the dock opened in 1880. (Gordano Society Town Trail c. 1991). This pill was the site of some trading in the medieval period: four 'watchmen' (customs officials) were appointed for the port as early as 1364 (LaTrobe-Bateman 1998: 17) and the post-medieval port was used for the export of coal from the Clapton in Gordano mines.

In view of the fact that further down the coast, the map depicts 'weres' at Watchet and Porlock, it is interesting that it does not depict any fishing structures by the entrance to Portishead Pill, where they were shown on the 1740 map of Portishead (BRO 04480; SHC T/PH/brc 2, 9).

A set of land transfers at the neighbouring manor of Capenor in c. 1558 included fishing rights in the Severn (Wigan 1932: 36). Later, in 1705, the '.. right of fishing by stages and netts in the Severne at Portishead..' was described as a manorial right (Wigan 1932: 87-88), and Collinson mentions that 'flat fish and sprats are caught on the beach' (1791: 144)

The 1740 manorial map shows three rows of 'fishing stages' on the beach below what would later be the site of the Empire Hotel, not far from the entrance to the Pill. The annotation refers to '25 stages, 7 stages and 6 weares'. This seems likely to refer to groups of nets (the 'stages') and the 'weares' may possibly refer to basket traps. The tidal rip along the beach at low tide in this area is phenomenally strong, and repair work must have been continuous. The remains of a line of stakes approximately along this line can be seen at low tide, but whether they are remains from this period or later is not clear.



Fig 2: Eastwood, Portishead from west, 1984

The air photograph looks back along Eastwood from Battery Point, where guns guarding the sea approaches to Bristol have been posted since at least the 17th century Civil War. Portshedpyll was replaced in the 1880 by Portishead Dock.

This is visible at the far end of Eastwood, after the removal of the Portishead Power Station, but before the development and gentrification of the site with the building of Port Marine between 1999 and 2003.

The muddy nature of the Severn foreshore is clear in Woodhill Bay, in the foreground.

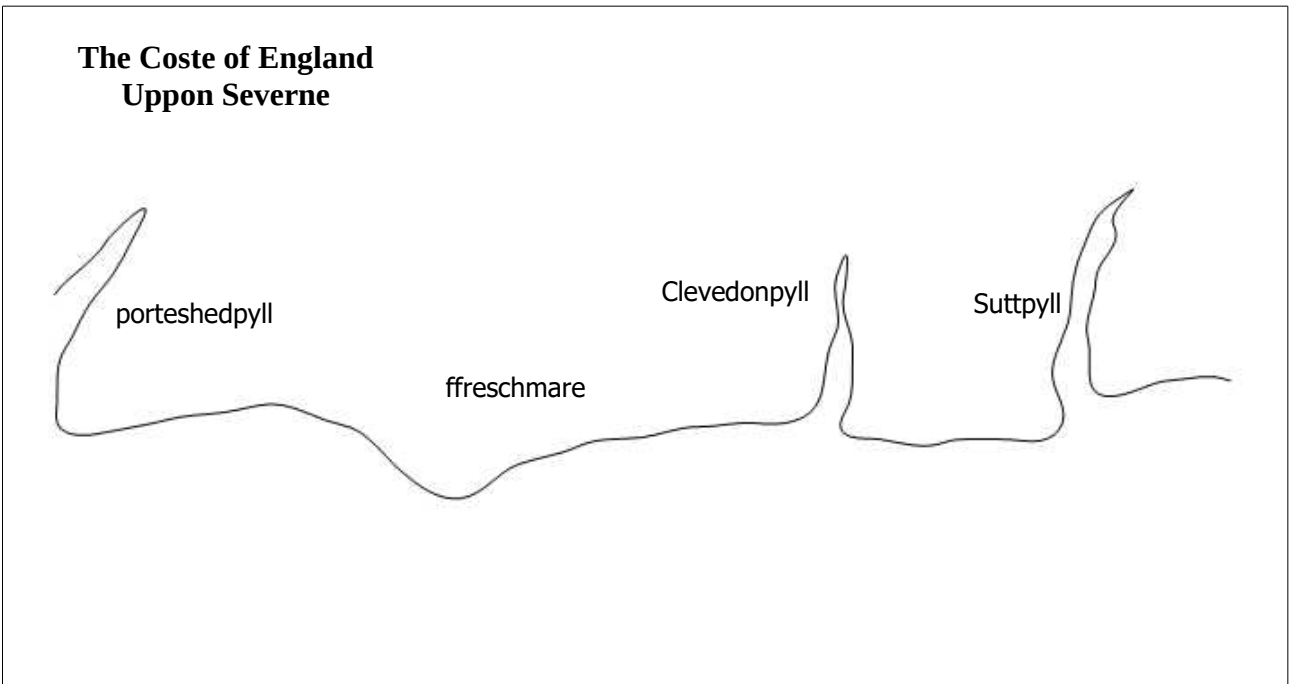
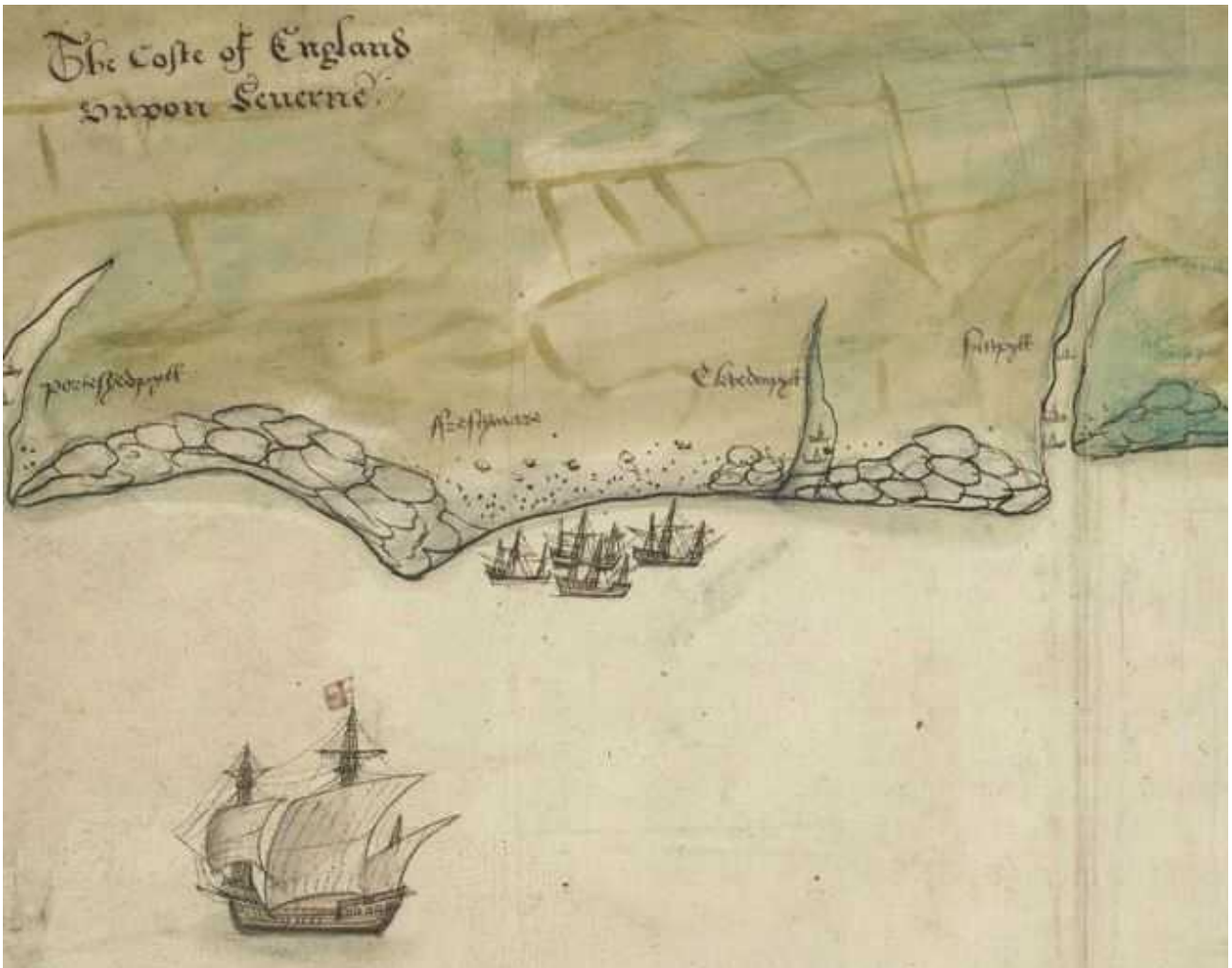


Fig 3: Portishead to the Kenn River

After Portishead, the map records the rocky cliffs of Eastwood, and rounds the corner into Kilkenny Bay, where another group of large ships are shown at anchor. and where the shore is once again shown (correctly) as low: before the construction of the Esplanade and Marine Lake here, which were opened in the mid-1890s, this area was known as Rodmoor (Crowhurst 1993: 15).

Around this point, the map records the place name 'ffreschmare'. The name does not seem to survive in the modern landscape, but it could refer to features anywhere along the coast from Portishead to Clevedon (or visible from the sea).

The only known 'mare' name along this strip of coast is Stoke-super-Mare (the former name of Walton St Mary, now a suburb of Clevedon), where an isolated parish church stood. It lay in ruins by the 18th century, but was restored in the late 19th century.

The 'fresh'- element of the name is curious: it may mean 'fresh water' (as opposed to salt) (Cavill 2018: 157), in which case the name may be 'fresh mere' (large pond or lake), but no such thing exists along the largely rocky coast from Portishead to Clevedon today.

After a rather inaccurate long low shore and short rocky one, the map arrives at 'Clevedonpyll'. The map maker has (slightly clumsily) attempted to show the curving entrance to the Pill which still exists. The harbour at Clevedon is still in use for small craft today, and the former remains of a wooden Clevedon flatner (a type of coastal sailing vessel) could be seen there up until c2005.

The map then depicts the low-lying coast between Clevedon Pill and the mouth of the Kenn River (but as a rocky shoreline, which it could not have been in 1539).

Suttpill was the former name of the entrance to the Kenn River, now more commonly known as Kingston Pill. Sette, Sutt, or even Slutt's Pill are recorded on county maps. Since the creation of the new Blind Yeo in the 1950s, into which much of the water in the Kenn River runs, this old river mouth has become not much more than a silted-up trickle: an undated (but probably post-medieval) wooden jetty was recorded here in 1997 (Hildich 1997).



Fig 4: The view over Wain's Hill and the Severn from the Old Warren Clevedon (S H Grimm, 1789) from British Library Collections.

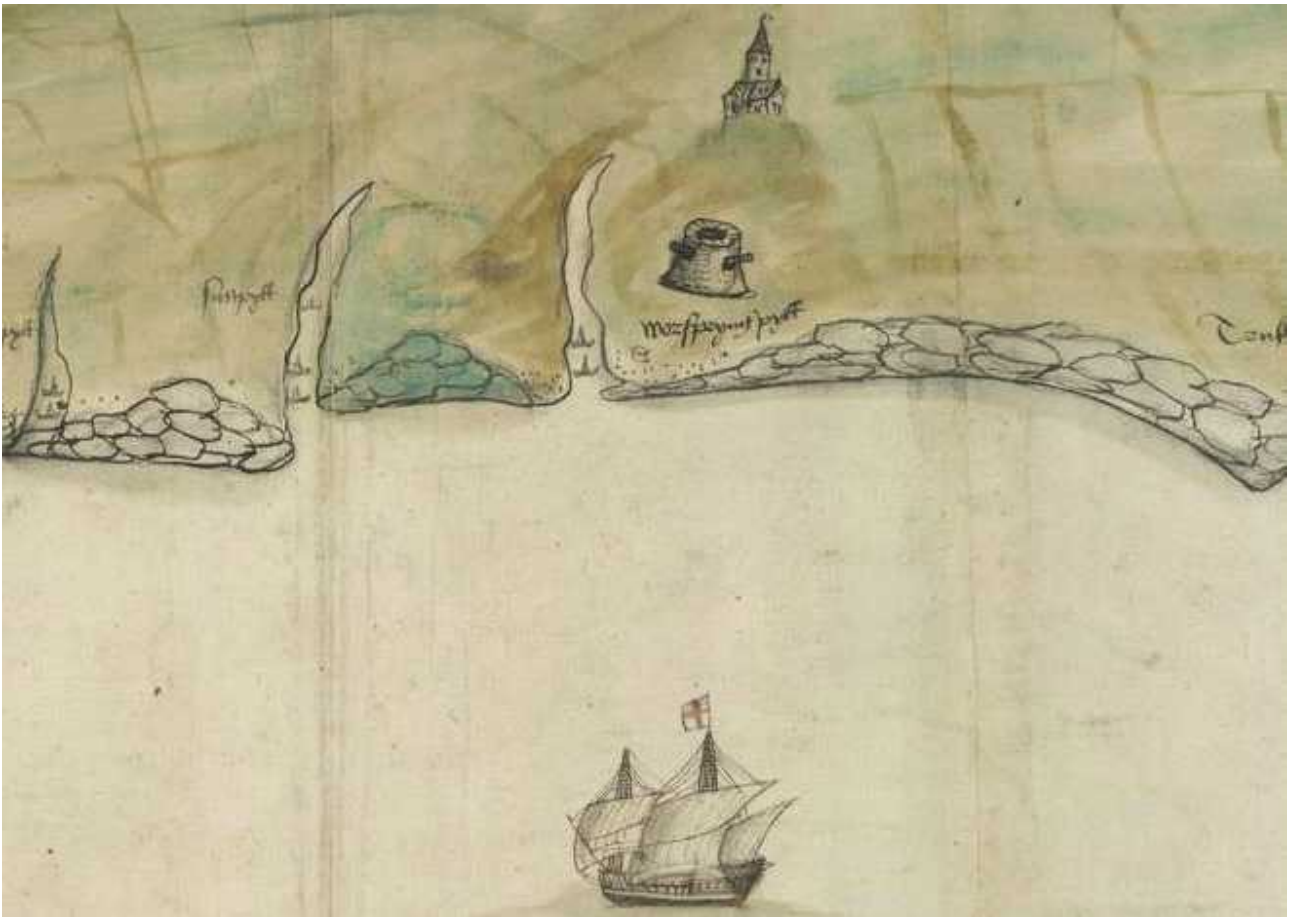
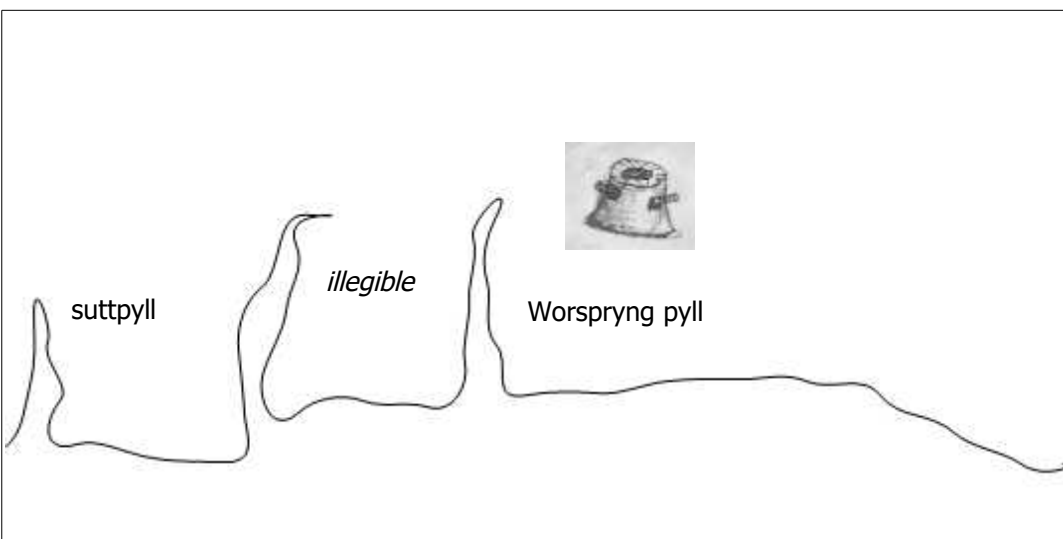


Fig 5: Suttpyll to Sand Point



Beyond Suttpyll, the map depicts a rocky area close to the coast, with above it, an illegible word. Apart from this, the mouth of the Congresbury Yeo seems to be completely ignored. The second element of the illegible word appears to be 'hill'. In this area, the low-lying areas of Wick Warth had not yet been secured from the sea: a map of c1780 (Fig 6 below) shows a line of mounds with the caption 'Called the West Wharf Wall to keep back the Spring Tides' (wall here used in it's Northmarsh sense of a clay bank between ditches).

Possibly an early version of this was mistaken by the surveyor for rocky shore, especially if the survey took place at high water.

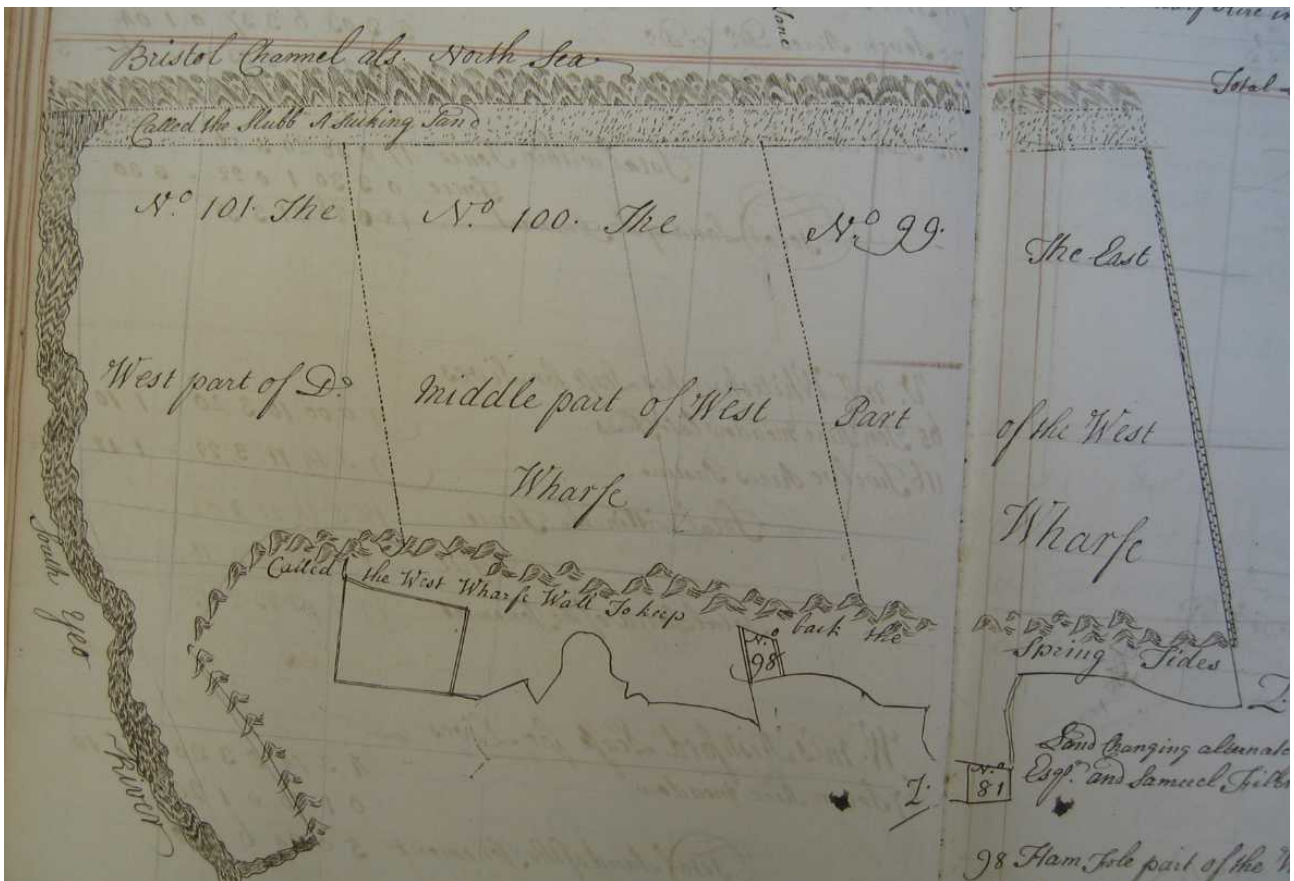


Fig 6: Map of Wick Warth, Wick St Lawrence, c 1780 (SHC DD\PT/H452/42)

The map next records 'Worspryng pyll' with one of the 'blockhouses' overlooking the pill, ironically (but clearly for the same reason) the site chosen for the WW2 military camp recently (2017) removed. There is no known evidence that this structure was ever built: it has been suggested that the structure called Castle Batch, near the other end of Sand Point was this blockhouse, but it seems unlikely, given the role of the blockhouse would be to protect the landing place at Woodspring Pill.

The large building in the background is Woodspring Priory, presumably regarded as a seamark. It is, rather surprisingly, represented with a spire (as is Uphill church, see below), but this may simply be a convention for 'church used a seamark'.

The map then marks the name 'Ceustock' (Kewstoke), although showing no features, before moving on to the area now occupied by Weston-super-Mare.

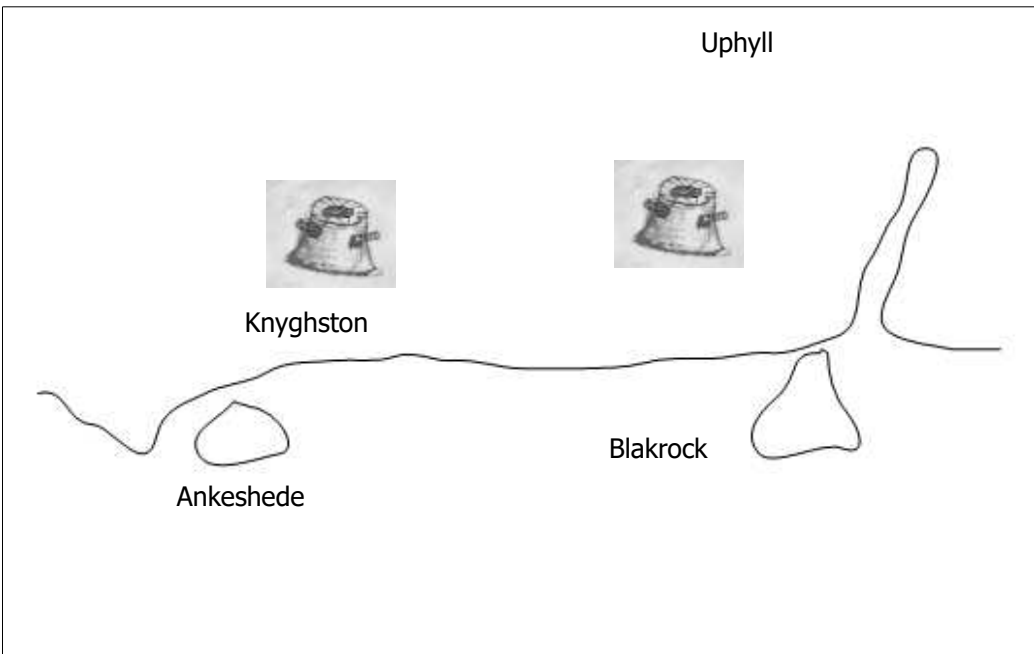
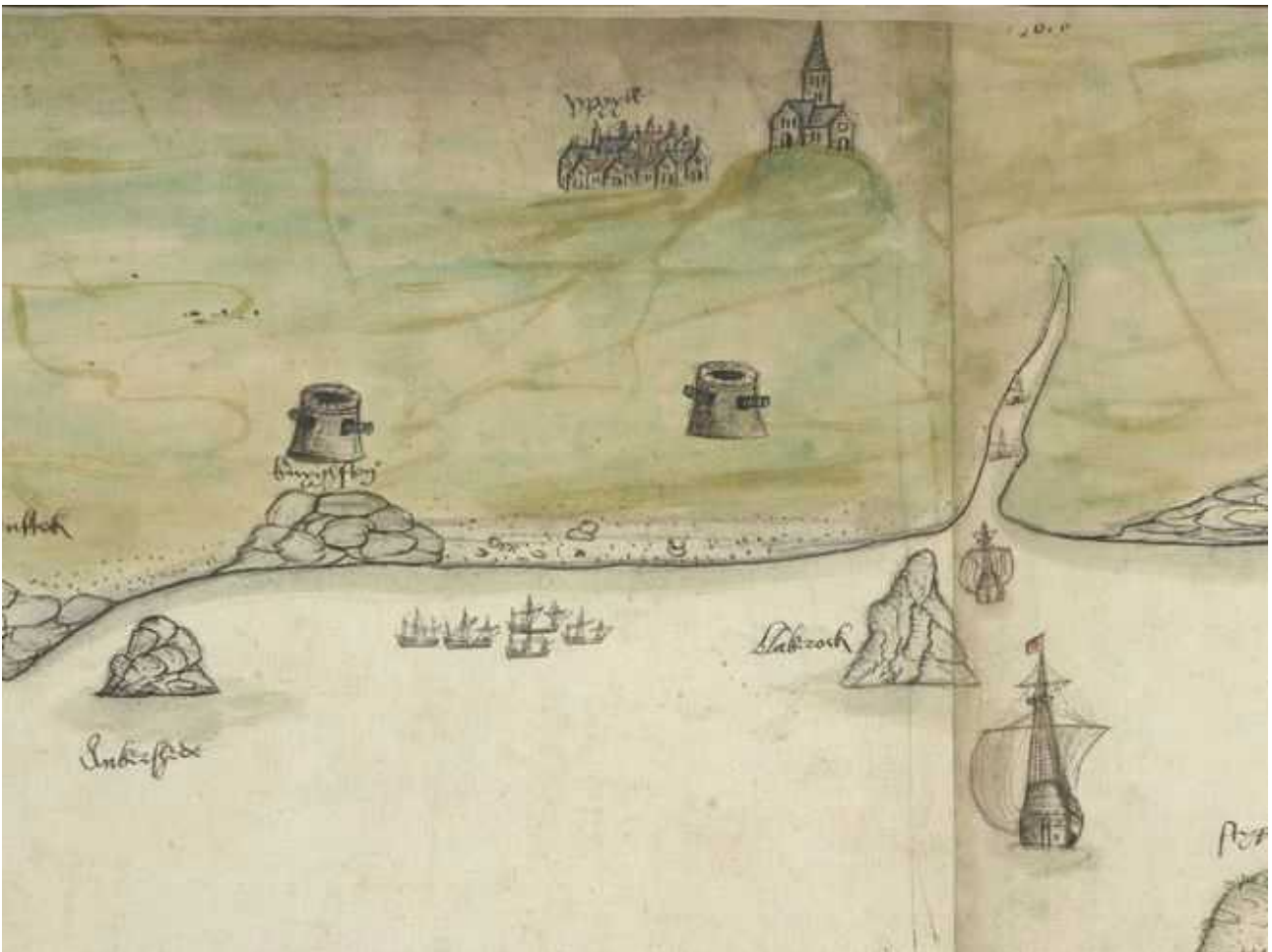


Fig 7: Kewstoke to Uphill

The map here exchanges the names of two points still known on the ground today. The little island (as it was until the 1820s) is Knightstone: the headland on the shore is now Anchor Head.

Blackrock (the traditional end of Mendip in the west) is a tiny islet opposite the mouth of the Axe, leading into the haven of Uphill, where another seamark is shown (the old church of St Nicholas, on Uphill Down).

Because of the naming confusion, it is not clear where the northern blockhouse was intended to be. There was at this time, a significant inlet that ran from what is now Marine Lake into Weston, with remains of a wooden vessel having been found as far inland as Grove Terrace, near Grove Park (LaTrobe-Bateman 1998). This would be what the blockhouse was intended to protect, which it could do from a site on Knightstone or at Anchor Head. Given how undeveloped this area was until the 19th century, it seems unlikely that a blockhouse built here would not have survived, at least as a ruin, until the time of the Tithe Map (1838). Neither is anything mentioned by any early antiquary.

The site of the southern blockhouse is even more obscure. If the blockhouses proposed were indeed the three-storey stone-built type, to defend Uphill haven and the mouth of the Axe, they could only be built on the solid geologies of the ends of Uphill Down or Brean Down, and there is no record of structures at either. The map appears to site the building in Weston Moor. but neither Weston or Uphill Tithe Maps, nor the initial OS map of 1809 show anything.



Fig 8: Weston Moor in 1809 (before Inclosure) (OS 1st Draft map in British Library). Note the track from Uphill to Weston along the beach, and the sand dunes at the northern end of the Moor

Unfortunately, the seamarks depicted do not appear to be naturalistic (so not evidence of Woodspring Priory and Uphill church once having possessed spires), but a generic indication.



Fig 9: Woodspring (left) and Uphill churches from the map



Fig 10: Black Rock, at the mouth of the Axe from Uphill Beach 2017 (Brean Down Farm behind)

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Date

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