

THE RIVER FAL

A Historical Guide from Source to Sea

D. G. Wilson

The Fal is known as a famous estuary on the south coast of Cornwall, busy with shipping for hundreds of years. The river itself is perhaps less well known, but nevertheless its rural course is full of great historical interest. The objective of this book is to bring that history to the eyes of all those who love the Cornish countryside.

The river is described from its source above the wild beauty of Goss Moor, down to where it meets the main estuary. The unique underlying geology has resulted in a fascinating varied terrain. The granite uplands were the source of tin and other metals from the Bronze Age almost to the present day. The same area has been exploited for its vast deposits of china clay, for the production of ceramics and paper making. Water from the Fal and its tributaries played a vital part in these industries.

Further down the valley the river flows through a landscape farmed for thousands of years, resulting in a picturesque pattern of fields on the valley sides and rich meadows on the flood plain. Within the landscape human settlements vary from Iron Age hill forts to villages dating from medieval times.

Water-mills along the course of the river were vital for corn milling and industrial purposes. Using fieldwork and early documents the author has researched the histories of these, and of the villages of Grampound, Ruan Lanihorne and Tregony, discussing the work of earlier writers. A range of expertly selected illustrations complement the informative text and feature aspects of the valley's superb natural environment in this authoritative volume.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

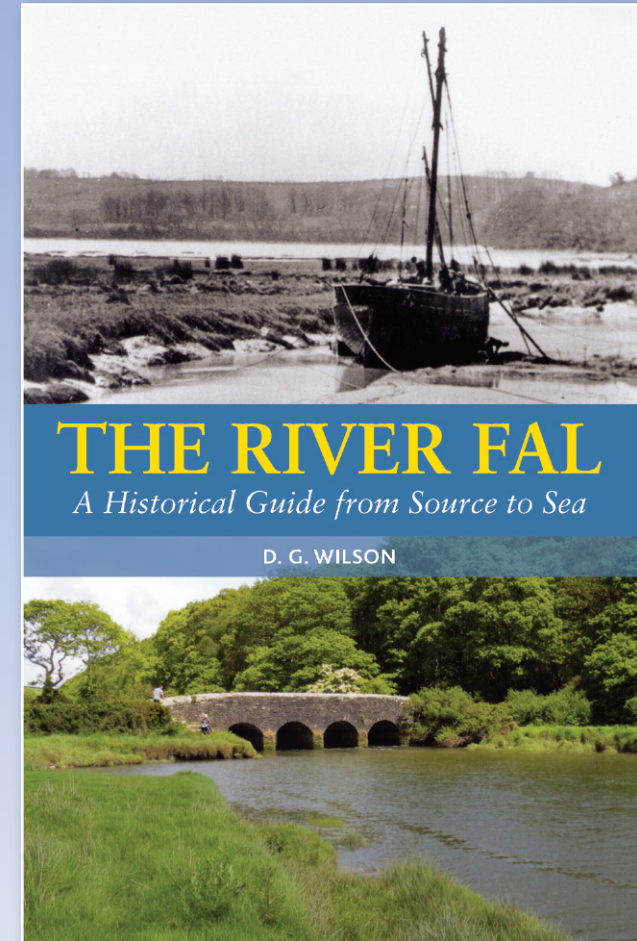
David Wilson has had many years of experience in amateur archaeology, local history studies and sailing traditional craft. He has previously published books on the history of the River Thames, including *The Thames, Record of a Working Waterway* and *The Victorian Thames*. Following a career as a Thames lock keeper he retired to Cornwall in 1997 and has since produced the

booklet *The Mills of a Cornish Valley* and the books *Falmouth Haven* and *Maritime History of Falmouth*. He has got to know his subject intimately, while sailing on the estuary, exploring the Fal Valley, and studying the history of the river through topographical and documentary sources.

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www.halsgrove.com e-mail: sales@halsgrove.com

THE RIVER FAL A HISTORICAL GUIDE FROM SOURCE TO SEA



The flood plain and viaduct over the Crowhill Valley.

Left: Creed church. In the spring the graveyard is covered with primroses.

Example of a double page spread



The River Fal at Golden. The Iron Age fort lies behind the trees on top of the hill.

4. Golden Mill

Further down the Fal Valley the hills still press in on either side, with the apparent intention of coming together to regain their territory lost during the Ice Ages. A mile or so down on the west bank, overlooking the unfrequented Golden Bridge, there stand the ramparts of one of the largest "hill forts" in Cornwall. Although unexcavated, it is likely to be of an early Iron Age date. It is now surrounded by trees but its commanding position above the Fal may be judged from the map: although there is level ground to the west, the other sides are defended by steep ravines to the north and south and by the Fal river. Close to the bridge stands lonely Golden Mill. It is accessed from the west via a sunken minor road, passing the

The two Golden Mill buildings, tucked below the tree-covered ramparts of the Iron Age hill fort.



GOLDEN MILL
A discarded "cog wheel", possibly a pit wheel, at Golden. A few wooden teeth remain in situ.

historic Golden Manor House and an ancient chapel in a farmyard. Golden, the medieval Wolvenden, is well-known because of the 1577 attack on the house and arrest of the owner, the Elizabethan recusant Francis Tregian, who was harbouring a Catholic priest. After a trial at Launceston the priest was executed. Tregian's wife and family were thrown out of the house and he lost the estates, spending many years in the Fleet Prison.

At the bottom of the hill, the handsome stone two-storeyed mill buildings and barn form a group partly surrounding a courtyard. The site is privately owned, deserted at the time of writing. There are no signs of water-wheels, or where the leats or launders reached the mill, nor the tail race. However, these can be deduced from the early large-scale Ordnance Survey maps. In the Cornwall Record Office there is a very rough sketch map depicting the mill leat. The map is undated but, from the style of writing, could be eighteenth century or earlier. The leat is shown leaving the Fal via a head weir, on the west side of the Fal, a little way upstream of Grampound Bridge, passing southwards under the A390 road. Apart from the first

High tide near the coal wharf in Ruan Creek in the early twentieth century. The man is sculling a typical small working boat. (Royal Institution of Cornwall.)

