

Penarth and Cosmeston Park Notes

Railway Line

Taff Vale Railway

After Penarth the stations were: Alberta Place, Lower Penarth, Lavernock, Swanbridge, Sully, Cadoxton

Opened in 1888. Closed 1968

History of Cosmeston

Cosmeston Lakes Country Park has been created from the remnants of the area's chequered past. From Norman times, ownership of Cosmeston has been connected with that of Cardiff castle.

In 1766 when John, the 4th Earl of Bute, married Charlotte Windsor, the lands became the property of the family who, directly or indirectly, would have the greatest influence on them. It was the Bute family who built the road that runs through the country park, the Mile Road, which runs from Cogan Hall farm at the north end of the estate to Swanbridge, which was, at one time, a small port for ships carrying goods across the Bristol Channel to Somerset.

In Cardiff, the 2nd Marquess of Bute constructed huge docks to accommodate the ships that were to transport the coal from the south Wales coal fields to markets worldwide. This demand for coal led to the rapid expansion of towns in south Wales, expansion that needed cement, which was made from the limestone found in places such as Cosmeston.

For over 80 years, most of what is now the country park was a limestone quarry, with four separate holes being dug to remove the stone.

1886-1970 The Quarrying Years

The quarries here provided limestone for the large cement works that stood until 1970 on the site of the present Cosmeston housing estate. Ownership of the site for the purpose of extracting the limestone for the production of cement commenced in 1886 to 1892 by W Li Morcom. In 1892 the land was leased (later purchased) from the Bute Estate and Cement was produced up to 1911 by the South Wales Portland Cement and Lime Company. From 1911 until its closure in 1969 the cement works were owned by BPCM (Blue Circle) The quarry forming the east lake was begun in the 1920s, but was enlarged when the quarry forming the west lake was opened up from the late 1940s.

The quarry had its own railway to take the stone to the nearby cement works. Limestone was transported over to the works using narrow gauge locomotives. The railway crossed the road where the present day park entrance is situated.

The peak year of production at the quarry was 1962, when 175,000 tons of cement were manufactured.

Originally, steam locomotives were used named 'Marjorie', 'Annie' and Doris named after the owner Walter Cooper's wife and two daughters. From 1951, newly-built Fowler diesel engines, took over the workload. After the quarry closed one of the engines was decommissioned the other two engines were refurbished and bought by the groundnuts scheme in Africa but were never sent as the groundnut company failed. This resulted in one engine being sold to the Welshpool and Llanfair Light railway and the other sold to the Welsh Highland railway in 1968. Today both engines have been reunited as they were later bought by Whipsnade Safari Park (in 1972 and 1975) who named them 'Victor' and 'Hector'.

Their famous 'Dragon' brand of cement was used to produce many of the early paving slabs laid in Penarth. The works finally shut in November 1969. Blue Circle stated it was not possible to upgrade the old plant to increase production any further, nor extend the existing quarries, which were closed in June 1970. The end of production also resulted in the closure of the railway line from the cement works to Penarth and this has now become a popular footpath.

The company vacated the premises in 1970. Today the works have gone, replaced by houses, and the railway line is now just a path. However, there are still some reminders of the quarrying years seen today. On Lavernock Road the factory office building still stands and is now a restaurant and the owner of the Cement works 1892-1911 lived at "The Elms" house with four "Tied Cottages" between the Elms and the office building also still remaining.

1964 – 1978 Landfill Site

A sad chapter in Cosmeston's history saw the quarry used for several years as a landfill site for household waste. Permission to tip household rubbish was granted to Penarth Urban District Council in 1964. After quarrying ceased scenes like these were common as the tipping of household rubbish continued until 1978 when the Country Park was developed.

There were four quarry areas at the site; two of these now form the lakes which are the main feature of the Country Park today. The other two sites were used for landfill. The two former landfill sites have been carefully landscaped to form large wildflower meadows and open grassland stretching up to the North end of Cosmeston.

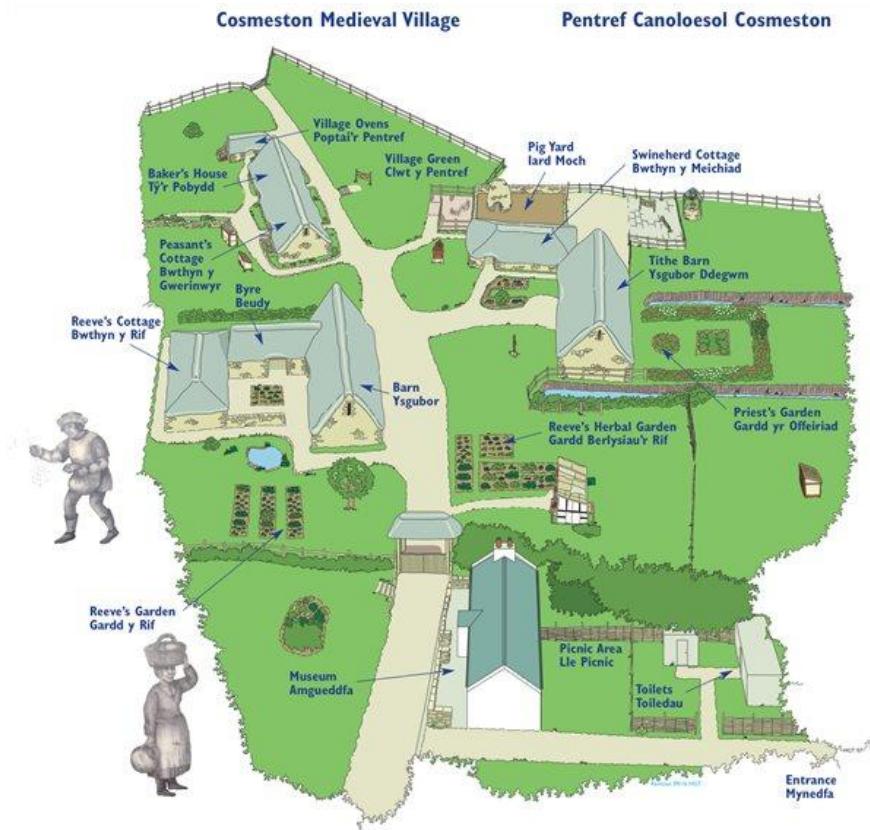
Both the lakes and the meadows found at Cosmeston are divided by the main footpath, Mile Road, that runs through the centre of the Country Park.

Today, little remains to inform the visitor of Cosmeston's chequered recent history. A narrow gauge tipping wagon pulled by the locomotives extracting lime stone from the quarrying years can be spotted in the car park.

In 1966, a government white paper recommended the establishment of publicly accessible country parks close to large towns and cities, and preferably on sites in need of improvement. Cosmeston was ideally suited - despoiled land close to Penarth and Barry and not far from Cardiff, created countryside on the city dweller's doorstep.

The then South Glamorgan County Council and the Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council together restored the land to provide an area of safe and accessible countryside. First opened in 1978, the country park is still being developed and improved. Unlike the town park, with its formal gardens and cultivated flowers, the country park is sensitively-managed countryside which provides a balance between conservation and recreation.

Cosmeston Medieval Village



During the development of Cosmeston Lakes Country Park in 1978, excavations uncovered the remains of a community over 600 years old, and so began a unique archaeological project to restore the village of Cosmeston.

The medieval village is set in the year 1350. It was a fascinating time in history as the village had been given a new boost of life by the de Caversham family.

Village History and Reconstruction

Ownership of the land around Cosmeston has changed several times since the Normans came to Wales.

Here you can read a brief overview of those changes and who or what might have had the biggest influence on the village.

11th century A.D.

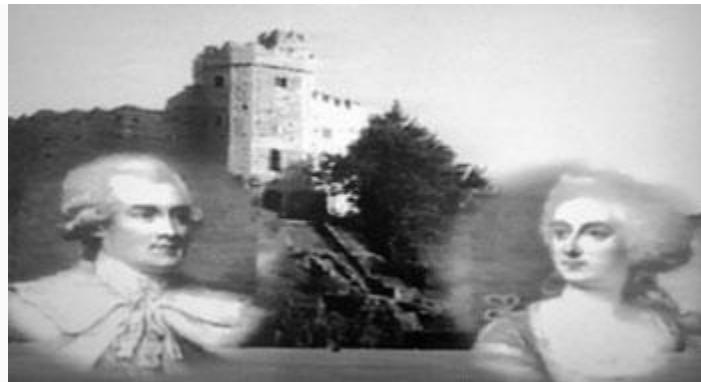
It is not known who owned the land around Cosmeston before the Normans came to Wales. It lay in the rich agricultural lowlands of the Welsh kingdom of Morgannwg which, towards the end of the 11th century A.D., was conquered by the Norman lord, Robert Fitzhamon and was established as the Lordship of Glamorgan.

Among his followers were the de Costentin family from the Cotentin peninsula in northern France. They are the first known lords of the manor of Cosmeston and gave their name to the village, Costentinstune (the place of the Costentins).

The Costentin family built the original manor house and perhaps a few dwellings or small farms, but for the next two centuries it appears that little further development occurred and unusually, no Norman church was ever established in the immediate area.

1317

By 1317 the manor had passed from the hands of the de Costentin family into those of the de Caversham family who, in turn, passed it on to the Herberts in 1550. Ownership of Cosmeston is connected with that of Cardiff castle.



1766

In 1766, when John the 4th Earl of Bute married Charlotte Windsor, the lands became the property of the family, who directly or indirectly would have the greatest influence on them.

It was the Bute family who built the road that runs through the middle of the country park and past the village, the Mile road running from Cogan Hall farm at the North to Swanbridge, which was at one time a small port for ships carrying goods across the Bristol Channel to Somerset.

1824

By 1824, all that remained of Cosmeston village were four isolated crofts and the Little Cosmeston Farmhouse as shown on the Marquis of Bute's detailed maps of the time. It is quite possible that the majority of the villagers were wiped out during the Black Death plague of the 1340s.



1978

Cosmeston Lakes Country Park and Medieval Village has been in the ownership of the Vale of Glamorgan Council since 1978.

It was during the development of Cosmeston Lakes Country Park in 1978 that excavation work undertaken by Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust revealed the remains of 13th-14th century stone buildings which led to a long term research programme being commissioned.

The Trust uncovered the remains of a community over 600 years old, and so began a unique archaeological project to restore the medieval village of Cosmeston. The importance of the medieval village at Cosmeston lies in its scale as most other excavations have been limited in both size and duration.

At Cosmeston the archaeologists have had the opportunity to excavate over long periods of time and these excavations have led to the full-scale reconstruction of a medieval village on its original site and foundations. The excavations have been interpreted and presented by archaeologists and the Vale of Glamorgan Council to provide an authentic picture of the settlement discovered at Cosmeston.

Painstaking excavation work revealed the remains of foundations that have lain buried for hundreds of years, where there once stood a flourishing community. The excavations also discovered interesting

finds these included, a metal knife, quantities of medieval pottery and animal bone and two prehistoric quern (grinding) stones.

The demesne was a part of the manorial lands supplying the lord with many of his luxuries. At Cosmeston, this land contained an orchard, fishponds and a dovecote. The excavated remains of the dovecote are located in the field west of the village across the mile road.



1980s

During the process of excavation in the mid 1980s, the Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust, in conjunction with the Local Authority, decided to reconstruct some of the excavated buildings. This has become one of the most exciting features of the project.

Parallel walls of limestone are filled with rubble. Daub (a mix of cow muck, clay and straw) acts as a cushion, levelling the stones and helping to bind them together. Upon the walls a timber roof is raised with large 'A' frames as the main supporting structure.

'Withy's are woven in to the main roof timbers to form a base for the thatch. A thatch of reed from the surrounding wetlands - or even straw if this is not available - are tied to the roof. After archaeological excavation and interpretation, the fabric of the buildings was reconstructed to provide a view of medieval life.

Although there can often be no certainty as to the original identity of a specific building, all the archaeological, architectural and historical information is used to recreate the village structures as close to the originals as possible. At Cosmeston, a well-matured area has been interpreted as a garden and been planted as such to include a variety of herbs for both flavouring food and medicinal purposes.

2011 onwards

During the dig in July 2011, several aquamanile fragments decorated with a ram's head were discovered at the site of the manor house. These vessels were used by guests to wash their hands at the dinner table. Read the [BBC news article](#).

Excavations are still ongoing at Cosmeston medieval village. The Vale of Glamorgan Council and Cardiff University of History and Archaeology have held digs onsite to discover more about the archaeology of this unique site.

Discoveries made during the digs include; the location of an ancient track way which may have been used for watering livestock in the nearby Sully Brook and a section of wall which may have related to a building known as Cosmeston castle.

The Village Buildings

Discover more about Cosmeston Medieval Village's buildings and their history

Although there can often be no certainty as to the original identity of a specific building, archaeological, architectural and historical information are used to recreate the village structures as closely to the originals as possible.



The Reeve's Buildings

The farm of Walter the village reeve is a series of buildings rented from the lord of the manor a cottage, barn and byre all constructed around an open courtyard and with adjacent gardens.

Although it cannot be certain that this is the reeve's home, the property is of such a standard that a villager of high status would have lived there.

The main of the village reeve role would have been to ensure that the village agriculture was running smoothly and that the peasants were looking after their crops and not encroaching onto their neighbours' property.



Jake's Cottage

This simple, rectangular style of building would have housed a less well-off peasant member of the community. There were two types, 'customary' tenants or 'free' villagers, who were eligible to sit on a jury in the manor courts and fill official positions such as reeve or bailiff. The 'villein' tenants were 'unfree' villagers who were tied to the land and bound to the village. These tenants would have lived under many restrictions, unable to leave the manor or get married without the lord's permission and having their ability to look after their own crops severely curtailed by having to work on the lord of the manor's fields.

The Baker's House and Village Ovens

The village baker was a man of substance who rented a building in which he produced his good in ovens and sold his baked goods. Only the baker, having paid the lord of the manor rental for the ovens, was allowed to bake bread. This did not make him popular with the rest of the villagers. Next to the baker's cottage is a small building constructed around two ovens. One is for baking bread and the other is a malting oven for roasting barley to make ale, as the bakers cottage is also the village tavern.

Divider Line



The Tithe Barn

The village tithe barn is where taxes were recorded and stored by the village priest before being moved on for sale or distribution to various clergy. Of all the medieval taxes, the tithe had an impact on most. Everything that was grown, produced or made was subject to a 10 per cent tax by the church.

The Swineherd Cottage

In a village environment, the swineherd could find themselves responsible for most of the village pigs as they foraged through the surrounding woodland. The nature of the swineherd's work is reflected inside his house, which is a combination of home, pig yard and butcher's. Outside is a small run and pigsty for when the pigs are brought in from the woods.



The Herbalists Hovel and Herb Garden

During the original excavations the archaeological team discovered the 'shadow' of a structure located near the North end of the village. This feature has always been known as building 'J' Nobody has ever known much about its use or reason for being. This has led to staff onsite deciding to construct a 'wattle and daub' structure to recreate a possible example of the building and its use.

Today it is open as the 'herbalist hovel' this is an area where a wise woman of apothecary may rest and store herbs as she works the herb gardens under the watchful eye of the village Reeve.

The reconstructed element of the medieval village represents only a small part of what would once have been the manor of Cosmeston. An important part of the project is understanding the context of the village in relation to the surrounding landscape. This would have consisted of farmsteads, wetland and coastal fishing sites, pastoral and arable farming, woodland and of course, the manor house with its associated farmland, gardens, orchards, fishponds and dovecote.

Reference for most of these notes is:

<https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/enjoying/Coast-and-Countryside/cosmeston-lakes-country-park/Cosmeston-Lakes-Country-Park.aspx>