

# THE HISTORY AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OF LIMPLEY STOKE

**"The land knows of its own beauty"**

Sir Kazuo Ishiguro, author  
*The Remains of the Day* (filmed here)

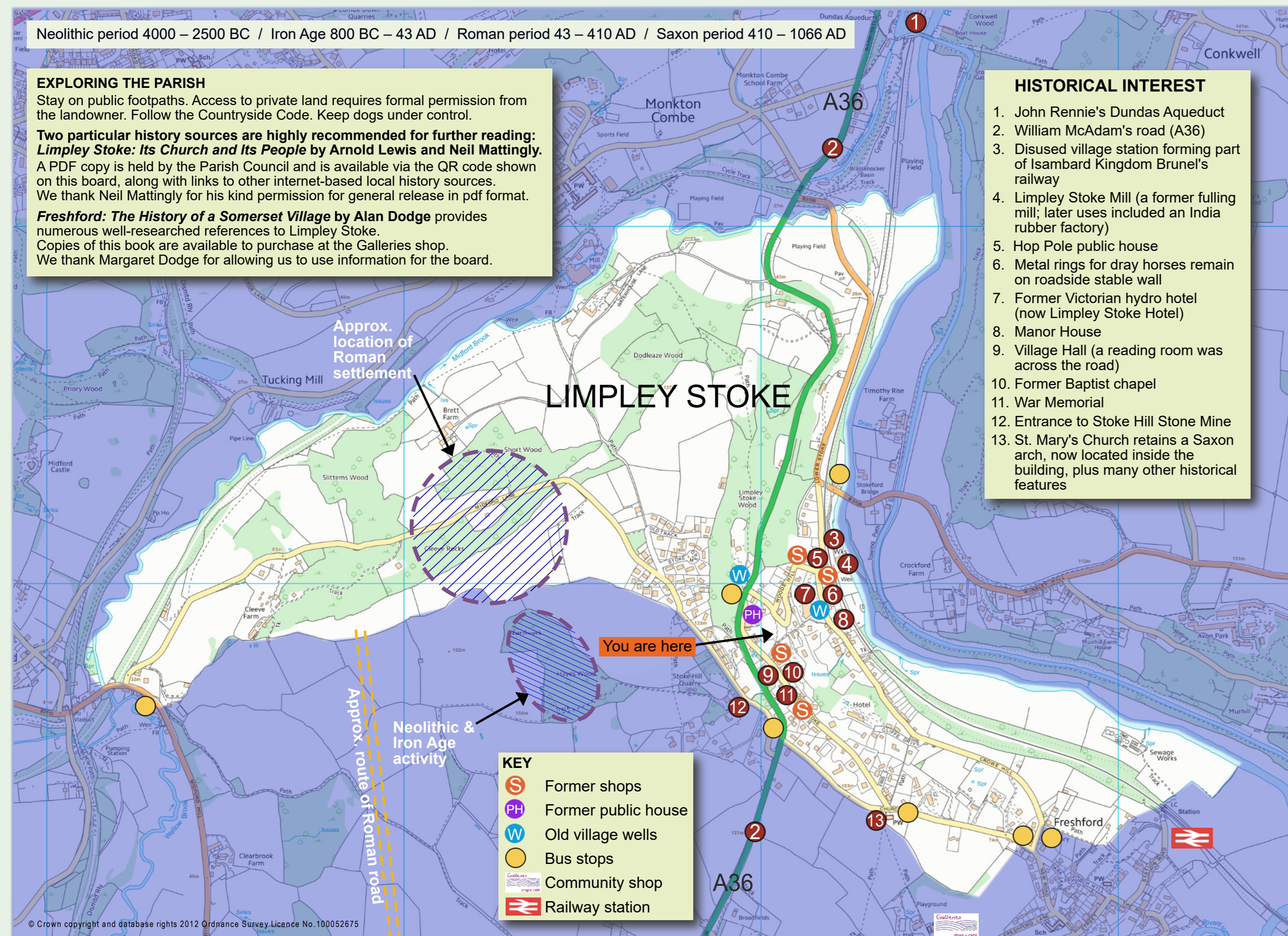
**"Happiness is in your head"**

Miles Kington, humorist, broadcaster,  
and musician lived here

**"It's love that sustains me"**

Jacqui Ruth Catcheside, local writer *Seeing Red*

## History Map and Timeline



All species rely on a range of habitats and together they form our local ecosystem

Flowers on the left margin of this sign are seen in April and May; flowers on the right margin in June and July. A full list of their names can be found on the QR code further information link below. A wildflower meadows protection initiative, in partnership with the Cotswolds National Landscape, was carried out here.

Barn owls fly silently over grassland hunting for small mammals. They nest in rural buildings and nest boxes fixed to trees.

Bats are numerous here. Our village falls within a Designated Special Area of Conservation for these mammals. They roost in old mine workings and rural buildings.

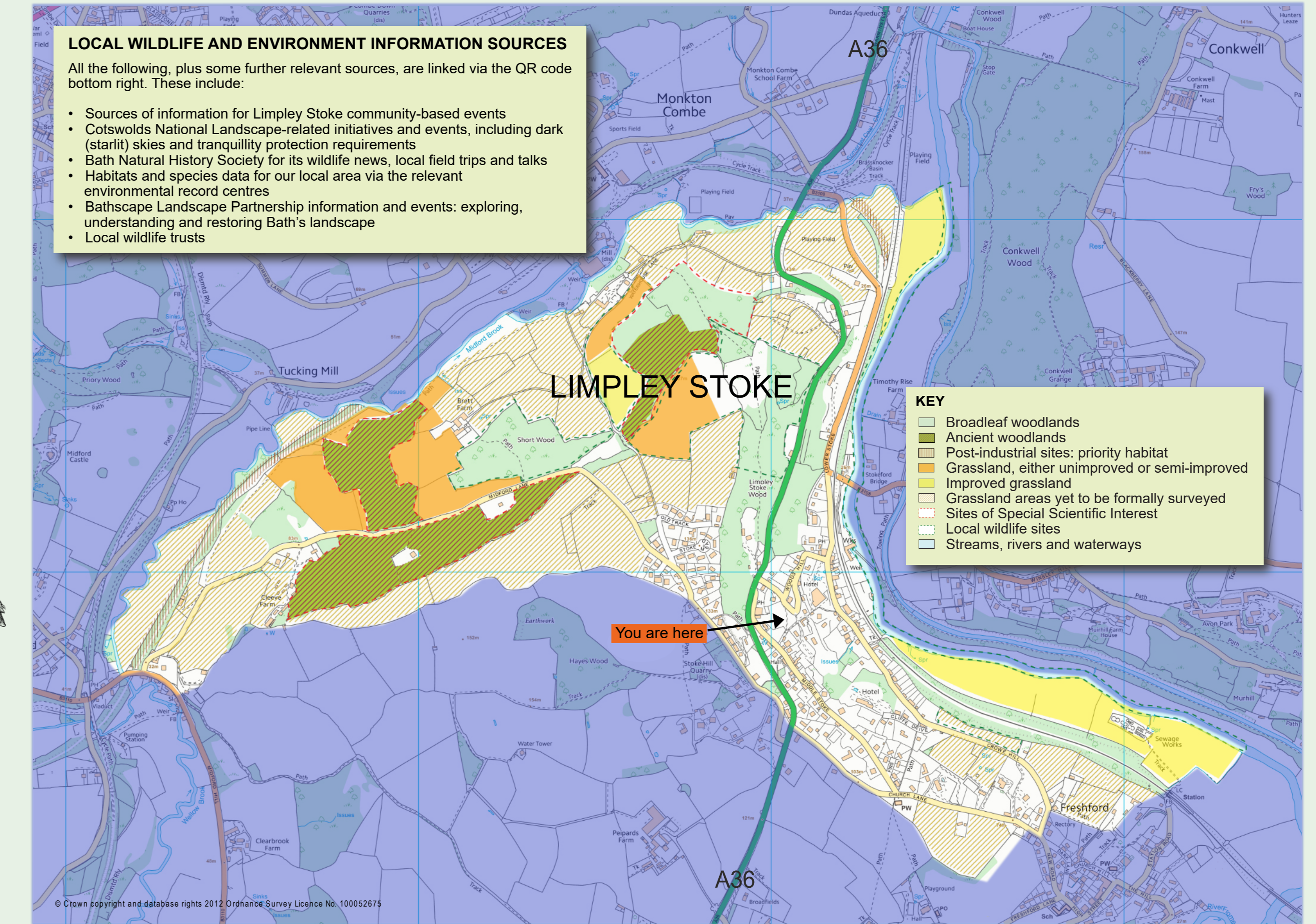
Otters catch fish in the river and canal. They have now returned as river pollution has reduced.

Herons and kingfishers fish along the river and canal.

Swift numbers are increasing, thanks to a local nest box programme. They return from Africa each year to the same nest.

Local limestone forms drystone walls for field boundaries and shelters smaller creatures, among which are amphibians such as frogs and toads, and reptiles including snakes and lizards.

## Habitat Map and Species



### Remarkable early progress

Neolithic pottery fragments (4000 – 2500 BC) and an Iron Age settlement (800 BC – 43 AD) were excavated at nearby Hayes Wood. Half the surrounding woodland was likely to have been cleared with crude iron tools by 500 BC. The more efficient ploughs of the Roman era (43 – 410 AD) enlarged Iron Age fields. A Roman settlement, and a road from Bath to the Dorset coast, have been found in the parish.



### A faith, a farm and a village name

Christianity had waned on the departure of the Romans. However, the conversion of Saxon King Cyneigils resulted in a resurgent church and the gathering of considerable landholdings and tithes. Our village church, St Mary's, was originally dedicated to St Edith of Wilton and probably served an early farm settlement (Stoc = outlying farm). The Reformation then ceded ownership to Henry VIII. The village church building is later identified as 'Our Lady of Limpley's Chapel and the Church House in Stook' when passed on as a gift by Elizabeth I. The current church retains a Saxon arch, a rare wall pulpit and early grave stones, among other historic treasures.



### Weaving, stone and sustained village growth

The Black Death arrived at Bristol port in 1347 and wiped out 20 per cent of the local population. Growth returned as local farms supplied wool for a weavers' cottage industry, which spread northwards through the village along Middle Stoke and down towards the river. In 1568, open-cast mining near Midford Lane provided quality stone for Longleat House. (A mine reopened in the 20th century to 'chase the seam' underground).

From 1610, a water-powered fulling mill drove wooden hammers to pound the wool cloth to increase its strength and thickness. More recently, the mill building housed a sawmill and an India rubber factory. Employment once peaked at 200 people. The mill closed for industrial use in the 1980s.



### Three great engineers open the way

By 1751, a road bridge had replaced the river footbridge and greater feats were to follow: John Rennie's construction of the Kennet & Avon Canal and Dundas Aqueduct (between 1794 and 1810); William McAdam's A36 Warminster Road (1830s), and Isambard Kingdom Brunel's railway (completed in 1857). Their genius and skills were tested: the road was dogged by landslips and Brunel noted the railway as "a tedious and rather difficult operation".



### Lower Stoke comings and goings

It is said that, following the death of Lord Nelson at Trafalgar in 1805, a grieving Lady Emma Hamilton, his mistress, visited the home here of his good friend, Captain Penruddocke, and scratched her initials on a window.

Weir House, which faces the river, was once home to the owners of the adjacent brewery. Metal rings to secure the dray carthorses remain on the roadside wall. In 1895, diphtheria closed a girls' reform school based at the Manor House.



### A Victorian hydro hotel

The hotel, which boasted recreational grounds and romantic views, was sited on land previously owned by the Dicke family. The abundant local spring water was collected in tanks and electrically-heated. Our village park was once part of the hotel grounds.

### Early 20th century

Village records list two pubs, post office, manual telephone exchange, sweet shop, grocery shop, newsagent, cobbler, garage, railway station, billiards and reading room, and a football team. Milk was delivered by pony and trap from Midford Lane. Local springs served village wells (mains water arrived in 1935).



### Remembering the brave

Ten villagers were lost to the two world wars, with others injured, shot down, captured, imprisoned or interrogated. The Luftwaffe bombed and strafed the railway and A36, and many fleeing the bombing of Bath and London found refuge here. Honours included the Victoria Cross, awarded to Reginald Hayward.

### For those who follow

Visiting his family here, radio astronomer Sir Bernard Lovell, founder of the Jodrell Bank Observatory, treasured the peace and beauty of this place amid his vital work on radar technology. May this inspiring landscape, and the brave endeavour shown by those past and present, serve to uplift spirits and inspire the safeguarding of this valley and our precious planet for those who follow.

## Welcome to Limpley Stoke

Set in the Cotswolds National Landscape

Please play your part in protecting the ecology, tranquillity, and starlit skies of the Cotswolds National Landscape

Scan the QR code with your mobile device for more detailed information sources, including a guide to village-based sources where upcoming local community-based events are advertised



Board funded by Cotswolds National Landscape, FLISCA, Limpley Stoke Parish Council and a family donation in memory of Elizabeth and Brian Coombe, who loved this park, nature and local history. Acknowledgement: © Cathy Adeane for all illustrations.