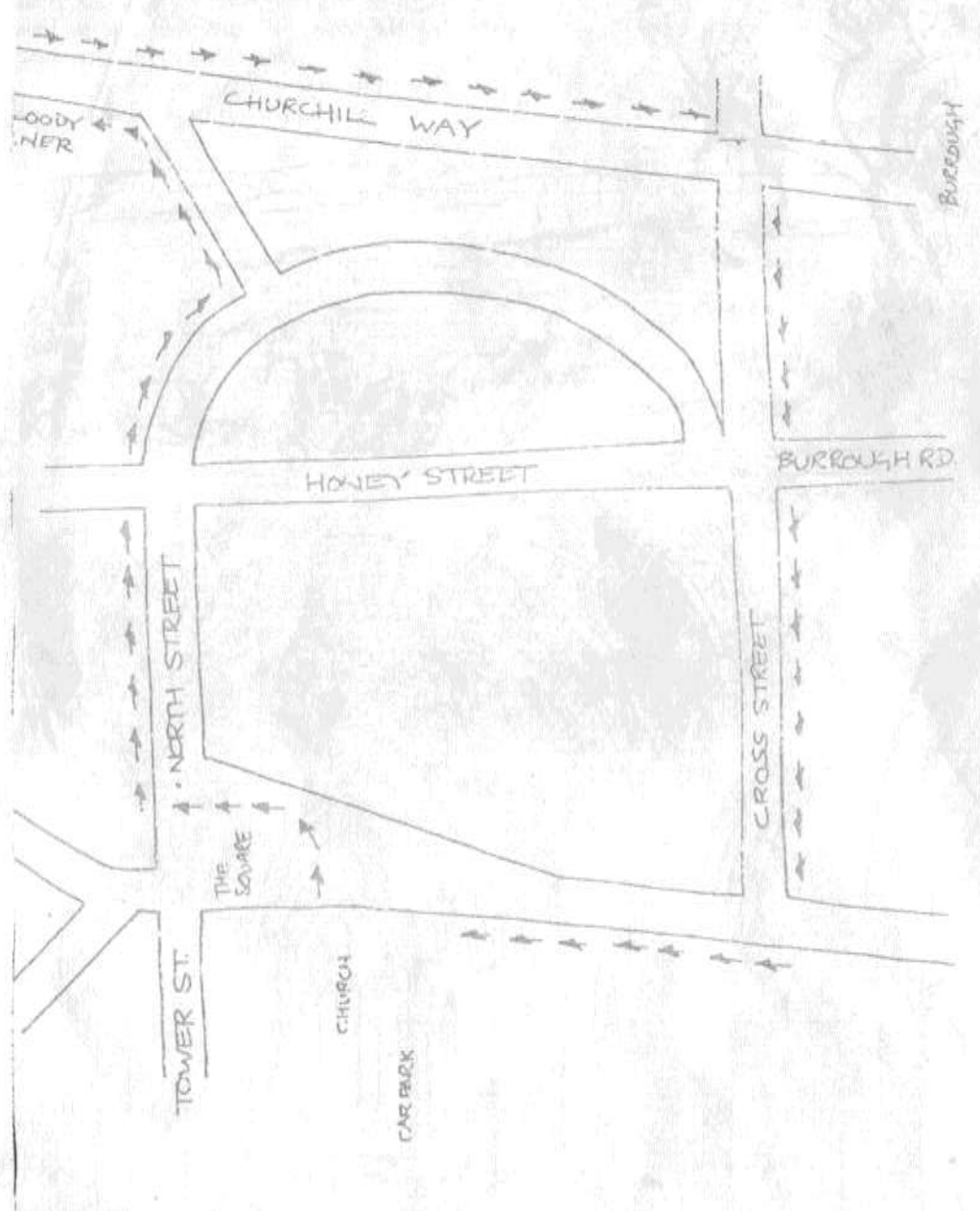


Northam Trail



By **PAT SLADE** and **BOB FANCOURT**.

Illustrated by **DAVID CHANCE**.

Northam Trail

NORTHAM is a town which dates back to pre Domesday (end of 11th century) and has, since its beginnings, been associated with the sea and seafaring families. The town is on sloping ground overlooking the Taw/Torridge estuary and Northam Burrows, which is still common land but is now also a D.C.C. Country Park.

The Church dates back to at least 13th century although the present St. Margaret's Church is mainly the result of a mid-Victorian restoration. Inside the church can be seen a pillar inscribed with the date 1593. The oldest bells were probably first cast in the 16th century, recast in 1770 and again in 1920. They are still regularly rung. The font dates from the 13th century. The stone and marble pulpit replaced a big, oak three-decker pulpit, possibly pre-Jacobean, which was traced in 1940 and taken, with difficulty, to Exeter, where during its restoration by Mr. Herbert Read, it was burnt during a bombing raid in 1942. A part of a pre-reformation litany, called the Northam Kyries, was discovered approximately 50 years ago binding some 16th century church warden's accounts. A reproduction hangs in the church while the original is kept with the parish records at the D.R.O. Exeter. The North side of the tower was painted white as a landmark to shipping until 1846. The section of the churchyard to the west of the tower contains a number of graves of shipwrecked sailors.

Due to vandalism the church is locked, but during the summer a church watch rota is organised. Visitors are welcome to look round at those



times (see notice board in church' porch).

From the church go out into the Square. Today it is surrounded by a newsagents, leisure centre, greengrocers, post office, churches, butchers, fish and chip shop, supermarket and a hardware shop. One hundred years ago many of these premises were different. The supermarket has at times, been a garage, a draper's and a bakery. The United Reform Church stands where there was once a gateway to a farm. In the years before 1961 the post office had been a public house, called *The Ringers Inn*, a bakery, a greengrocer's and grocer's.

Between the post office and Evan's greengrocers (Tower Street) there were, until 1958, two cottages and traffic moved both ways through a very narrow part of the street from New Causeway Hill into Pimpley Road (now Sandymere Road).

To your left is the leisure centre which until 1969 was an infant school educating approximately 100 children at one time. The site is thought to have been a workhouse in the 18th/19th centuries. The space in front of the church was once a church owned alehouse and just a few yards up from the newsagents were the first floor vestry' rooms, once also used as a charity school, with the lock-up in the ground floor area.

Now follow North Street leading out of the Square to the right, between the butchers and the United Reform Church. Next to this church the row of cottages were thatched within the last fifty years. As you go up the hill to your right you will see a Victorian villa, and over the wall to your left, a good view of Skern (a Danish word meaning haven), the Burrows, the Estuary and Bideford Bay to Baggy Point. On the right you will pass No. 14 with its slate steps, which is possibly the oldest house in the street.

On the corner with Honey Street, you can see a deconsecrated chapel - note the blocked windows. To the left on the corner with Oxman's Lane you can see a pebble, placed there to prevent damage to the walls from passing vehicles. Further on the left you will pass Richard's Bakery (shop now transferred to the Square), now the only bakery in Northam. Follow the road as it bears left, past Daneshay (reference to pre-Norman invasion) and follow the Appledore road to Bloody Corner.

The plaque on the right was erected by a local historian, Charles Chappell, to mark the supposed spot where Hubba the Dane was buried following a battle at Kenwith, near Abbotsham. While there is no proof of such a battle, it is known that in the 9th century, the Danes mounted summer raids all round the coast of Devon and Cornwall having wintered in South Wales.

Towards the river you will be able to see the roof of Appledore Shipyard, a new part of British Shipbuilders. When it was built in 1969 it was the largest covered shipyard in Europe, and now constructs ships up to 10th thousand tonnes.

Further down the road, behind the trees, stands Knapp House which dates from the 11th century and is best remembered as the, home of Thomas Benson, a shipowner, who burnt his ships for insurance money in the 18th century. Also, it is said that, as a boy, Guy Burgess (Burgess and Maclean - spies) whose family owned Knapp House between the two World Wars, was a frequent visitor.

Now retrace your steps back along the Appledore road and Churchill Way until you reach the end of Cross Street with the bollards on the right. Almost directly opposite is Windmill Lane, at the end stands the site of an old windmill. On the corner of Windmill



Lane are Council Offices built for the old Northam Urban District Council, and now used as the Registrar's Office for the Torridge District Council, covering an area from Instow to North Cornwall and almost to Okehampton. Northam Town Council also hold their meetings there.

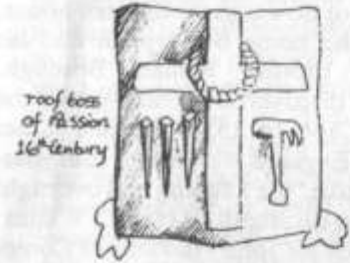
Further up the main road is Borough Farm, formerly an ancient manor but now a more modern house. It was the home of Stephen and his younger brother William Borough. Stephen discovered Russia, named the North Cape in 1553, became Chief Pilot of England was one of four masters to have "the keeping and oversight of Queen Elizabeth I's Navy". William succeeded Sir John Hawkins as Comptroller of the Queen's Navy and was Vice-Admiral under Sir Frances Drake in the expedition to Cadiz in 1590.

Turn right and walk along Cross Street. On your right number 58 was built on the site of the village "pound" where stray animals were enclosed and returned to the owner on payment of a fine. As you reach the crossroads take yourself back to only 1968 when this was the main route to Appledore with heavy lorries going to the shipyard as well as buses and lesser traffic constantly squeezing around the tight corners and through the narrow streets.

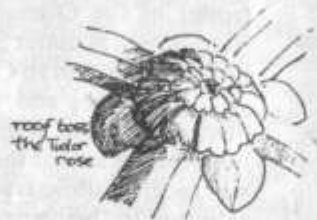
During the first part of this century Cross Street was an important shopping street for the village. Local people will be able to tell you of some of the shops that are now private residences. Today, apart from the few shop fronts and the small number of remaining businesses, the street shows little sign that within living memory it was once one of Northam's busiest shopping streets and thoroughfares, although at that time many shops in Northam were small scale and often run from the traders' front rooms. Here were the telephone exchange at No. 10 with a

public telephone kiosk and post box outside: the post office at No. 5: a grocers, greengrocers, blacksmiths, decorators, souvenirs and gift shop as* well as the fish and chip shop almost opposite the present one.

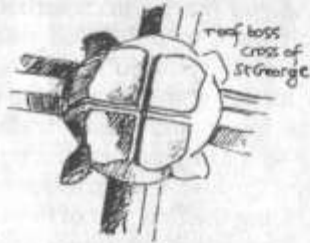
If you turn right, a few steps will bring you back to the Square.



roof boss of Passion 16th century



roof boss the Tudor rose



roof boss cross of St George



Isabellian inscription on pillar capital



1877



Sailor's grave 1845



roof sculpture



5th century Font



Badgy Point and mouth of the Torridge from North Street



DRAWN BY THE AUTHOR