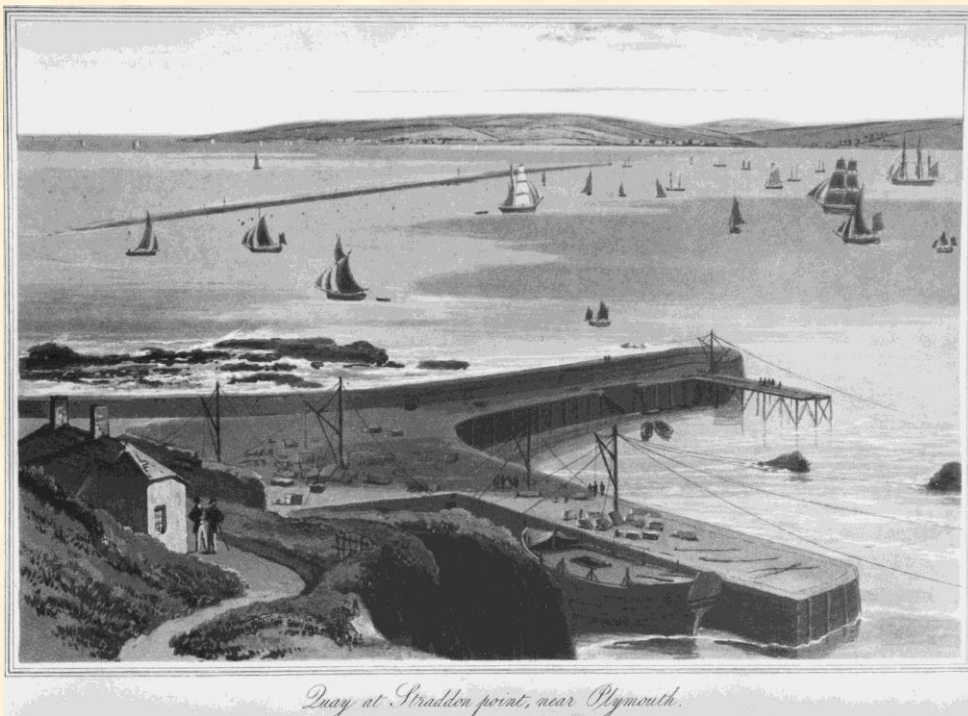


Liberty of the Water Tamar

The Liberty was a jurisdiction administered by the Saltash Corporation from medieval times until 1886. It covered Plymouth Sound and the whole estuary system, apart from Sutton Pool and the River Plym above Prince Rock (near the present-day Laira Bridge).

Within this extensive area, Saltash controlled various activities, such as fisheries (including the oysterage) and the collection of dues for anchorage, buoyage, etc. The Mayor of Saltash held inquests on all dead bodies found in the Liberty. The Town Sergeant carried out arrests on board ships.

In the 18th century the Port Dues payable were as follows: British vessels, 1 shilling (the Royal Navy was exempt), Foreign vessels, 2 shillings, except Spanish ships, for whom the rate was 6 shillings! (probably due to the War of Jenkins' Ear, 1739–1748).



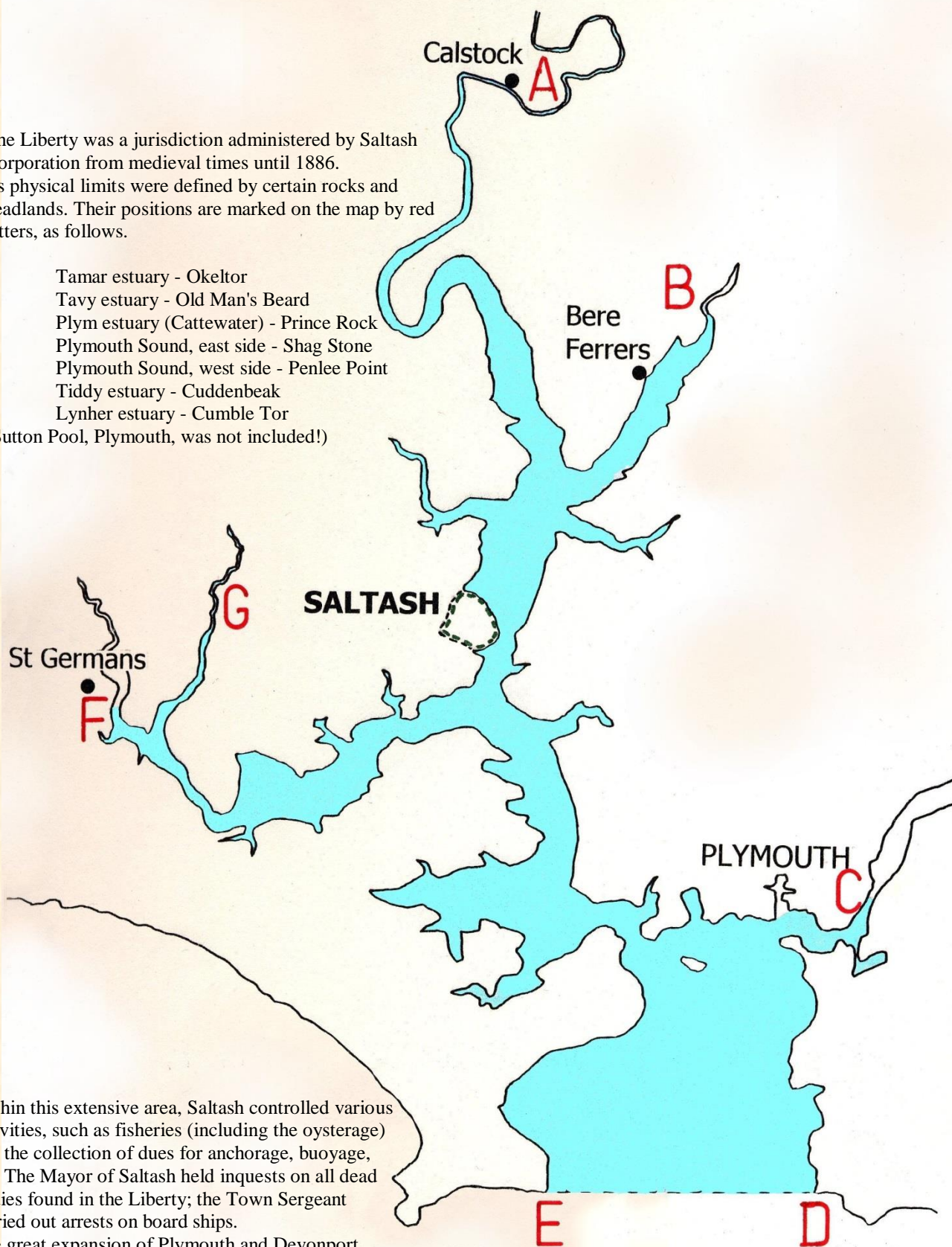
The southern limit of the Liberty was the mouth of Plymouth Sound. In this view of circa 1820 the partially-constructed breakwater can be seen. Bovisand Pier is in the foreground.



This print depicts the Cattewater circa 1820, viewed from the walls of Plymouth Citadel. Except for the mouth of Sutton Pool on the left, all this was part of Saltash's Liberty of the Water Tamar. (The 17th century Mount Batten artillery tower can be seen on the promontory.)

The Liberty was a jurisdiction administered by Saltash Corporation from medieval times until 1886. Its physical limits were defined by certain rocks and headlands. Their positions are marked on the map by red letters, as follows.

- A Tamar estuary - Okeltor
 - B Tavy estuary - Old Man's Beard
 - C Plym estuary (Cattewater) - Prince Rock
 - D Plymouth Sound, east side - Shag Stone
 - E Plymouth Sound, west side - Penlee Point
 - F Tiddy estuary - Cuddenbeak
 - G Lynher estuary - Cumble Tor
- (Sutton Pool, Plymouth, was not included!)



Within this extensive area, Saltash controlled various activities, such as fisheries (including the oystering) and the collection of dues for anchorage, buoyage, etc. The Mayor of Saltash held inquests on all dead bodies found in the Liberty; the Town Sergeant carried out arrests on board ships.

The great expansion of Plymouth and Devonport meant that eventually this situation became untenable. Accordingly the Liberty was terminated in 1886, when Saltash received a new borough charter. However, the collection of port dues was permitted until 1901.



Whatever the original obligations regarding the many rocks and reefs within the Liberty, by the 18th century Saltash Corporation was maintaining a warning buoy on just one! That was the **Cobler Reef** (circled on this extract from an 1857 Admiralty chart), a serious hazard on the approach to the Cattewater and Sutton Pool. However, the Cobler Buoy was not important after the completion of Mount Batten Breakwater in 1879.



Northwards, the Liberty extended to Okeltor, a mile above Calstock. In this view of the Tamar, looking south in 1972, the Liberty's boundary mark is carved on the rock that protrudes from the right-hand bank, near a building.



At Okeltor the letters "SB", meaning Saltash Boundary, are cut into the rock-face to indicate the former limit of the town's jurisdiction over the Liberty of the Water Tamar.



On the River Tavy estuary the termination of the Liberty of the Water Tamar was a rock on its west bank, called Old Man's Beard. The rock cannot now be seen, probably because it has become permanently submerged due to the construction of Lopwell Dam a short distance downstream in 1959. (This photograph was taken in 2002; it shows the dam, a fish-pass and a pumping station.)



Looking northwards along a length of the River Lynher estuary, circa 1980, with Bagmill Farm in the foreground. To the north there is an area of woodland containing two dead trees. Adjoining them (but not visible) is Cumble Tor, a rock on the edge of the estuary. This served as the boundary marker for the Liberty of the Water Tamar on this river.



A section of the River Tiddy estuary, circa 1980. Downstream from the railway viaduct is St Germans Quay. Immediately above the viaduct is Cuddenbeak, a wooded protrusion in the valley-side. It once marked the limit of the Liberty of the Water Tamar. The estuary continues from the bottom right; it almost reaches Tideford village. At the top of the photograph is a tributary, Polbathick Lake.

Replicas of Saltash's silver oar-maces



Their form is a rare combination of a normal mace-head and an oar-shaped shaft, the latter symbolizing the borough's authority over the 'Liberty of the Water Tamar'.

One mace (above left) is dated 1623 and also bears the initials of Edmund Herring, then Mayor. Another mace (above right) was obtained during the reign of Charles I (1625-49).

Some other English towns which exercised jurisdiction over estuaries possess oar-maces, but Saltash's are the oldest in the country

In 1760 following victory in a legal case, members of Saltash Corporation decided to exercise with renewed vigour their right to collect Anchorage and Buoyage dues within the Liberty of the Water Tamar. They appointed a new Collector and provided him with a pocket-size silver oar-mace (left) as a symbol of authority.



Tamar Valley otter