

CHANGING LANDSCAPES

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INTRODUCTION

The town and the Island

St Ives is a thriving market town in Cambridgeshire around 24 kilometres (15 miles) north-west of Cambridge, and 110 kilometres (68 miles) north of London, within the historic county boundaries of Huntingdonshire. Previously called Slepe – an old Saxon word meaning muddy – its name was changed to St Ives after a body, claimed to be that of a Persian bishop Saint Ivo, was found buried in the town in about 1001-2.



Early days

Built on the banks of the River Great Ouse between Huntingdon and Ely, St Ives has a famous chapel to St Leger on its bridge. It is possible to gain access to the chapel by borrowing the key from the Norris Museum, on the Waits. In the Anglo-Saxon era, St Ives' position on the river Great Ouse was strategic as it controlled the last natural crossing point or ford on the river, 80 kilometres (50 miles) from the sea. The flint reef in the bed of the river at this point gave rise to a ford, which then provided the foundations for the celebrated bridge. Holt Island is located at the western end of the town of St Ives, adjacent to the Anglican Parish Church of All Saints.

Expansion and wealth

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries St Ives was a hub of trade and navigation (see print above). Goods were brought into the town on barges, and livestock rested on the last fattening grounds – the lush water meadows – before delivery to London's Smithfield Market. As the railway network expanded and roads improved, the use of the River Great Ouse declined. It is now mostly used for leisure boats and recreation.

Living with flooding

The river Great Ouse at St Ives flooded badly in 1947, and some parts suffered seriously again at Easter 1998 and in January 2003. Extensive flood protection works were carried out on both sides of the river in 2006-7 at a cost of nearly £9 million. Five hundred metres (1,600 ft) of brick-clad steel-piling was put into place to protect the town, most noticeably at the Waits, where a pleasing plaza has also been created. A further 750 metres (2,460 ft) of earth bank and piling on the other side of the river protects Hemingford Grey, reducing the yearly risk of flooding from 10% to 1%. Building on the flood plain at St Ives is now discouraged.

Holt Island

The eastern or town end of Holt Island is now a nature reserve. Holt Island, or rather Ingle Holt as it was originally called, was owned by George Wright-Ingle, Lord of the Manors of Hilton and Fenstanton. Upon his death, and that of his son, ownership of the island passed into the hands of his daughter Mrs Olive Sutton who, in 1934, decided to donate the Island to the town. For many years until the 1970s the island was used as an osier bed by local basket makers. Since 1995 the island has been managed as a nature reserve by Huntingdonshire District Council's Countryside Services team.

RESOURCES

www.stives-town.info/river_great_ouse/local_history_of_the_river.asp for historical facts and fascinating photographs to compare with the town now.

Use the SURVEY SHEET later in this section to compare and contrast different parts of Holt Island with a different location within the town.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WILLOW

Holt Island was worked as a commercial osier bed by Jack Harrison, grandson of John Harrison who founded a basket-making company in 1877. His importance in the town is recognised by the bypass - Harrison Way - named after him. A hybrid willow - Harrison Willow - also carries his name. There are 18 species of willow native to Britain and over 100 hybrids of which Weeping Willow is the best known. However, Weeping Willow cannot be used to make baskets as it doesn't bend.

An osier is any willow with flexible stems (wands) used in basket making. Osiers are grown in dense beds and regularly cut down to ground level to encourage the growth of long straight wands. Holt Island is an ideal site for osiers as willows like wet roots, and can grow in permanently wet or frequently flooded areas. The flooding brings plenty of nutrients onto the island ensuring good growth. You can see that the planted areas on the Island have a ridge and furrow appearance. The willows were planted in the furrows, whilst the harvesters can keep a little drier standing on the ridges.



How willow is used

Willow baskets were once very important but many items are now made using plastic or are imported from elsewhere. British basket makers are now rare, although in Norfolk and Somerset key growers remain and have enough skilled staff to meet the demand.

Willow had many uses: it formed the frame for some of original, now classic, cars, and it is still used to make fences and hurdles, coracles, furniture, bike baskets, hot air balloon baskets, sculptures, charcoal pencils and the frames of soldiers' busby hats.



ISLAND WILLOW

Once the commercial use of willow declined, and Mr Harrison's business ceased trading, the Island became quite overgrown. In 1995 HDC Countryside Services engaged the help of a master basket maker from Peterborough, Len Wilcox, and started to clear some of the overgrown areas. Over the following years, willow was again planted by volunteers and the annual crop is used for sculptures, living willow arches and tunnels and in basket-making workshops. Unlike the old days, the willow is not boiled to create buff willow, but can be stripped to create white willow, or used with the bark intact as brown willow.

Willow and wildlife

Around 450 animal species are known to feed on willow. Many insects require both water and trees to be present in their complicated life cycle, and so Holt Island is very important for invertebrates. In turn, these provide food for large numbers of wetland fauna, and especially birds. With the dense re-growth property of willow, it also forms well-protected areas for nesting birds such as Reed and Sedge Warblers and Reed Bunting.

Willows flower early in spring making them popular with bees. It is important for bees to quickly find this essential source of food so that they can then continue with their vital pollination role as they feed and forage elsewhere.



Willows love our Island but there are problems for them too! Green fly can attack buds and stop growth, and rabbits and deer are particularly fond of young sweet shoots. After several years of trying to crop Holt Island willow at ground level, you can now see we coppice at waist height to form pollards to discourage Muntjac deer eating the new shoots!



Willow names
The following willow types can be found on Holt Island. Use the Spotter Guide and Interpretation boards on the Island to help you identify them and learn more about Harrison's basket-making business. The Island map will show you where the osier beds are located.

- Crack Willow *Salix fragilis*
- Violet Willow *Salix daphnoides*
- Purple Willow *Salix purpurea*
- Golden Willow *Salix alba vitellina*
- Black Maul *Salix triandra*
- Common Osier *Salix viminalis*



WONDERFUL WILLOW WORKSHEET

Here are some questions about willow that you will have fun answering. If you don't already know the answers, check out the previous WILLOW pages. Space is provided here for you to write your answers and to add some drawings

1. There are over 300 different types of willow in Britain. On Holt Island there are several including Harrison Willow and Golden Osier
What is special about them?

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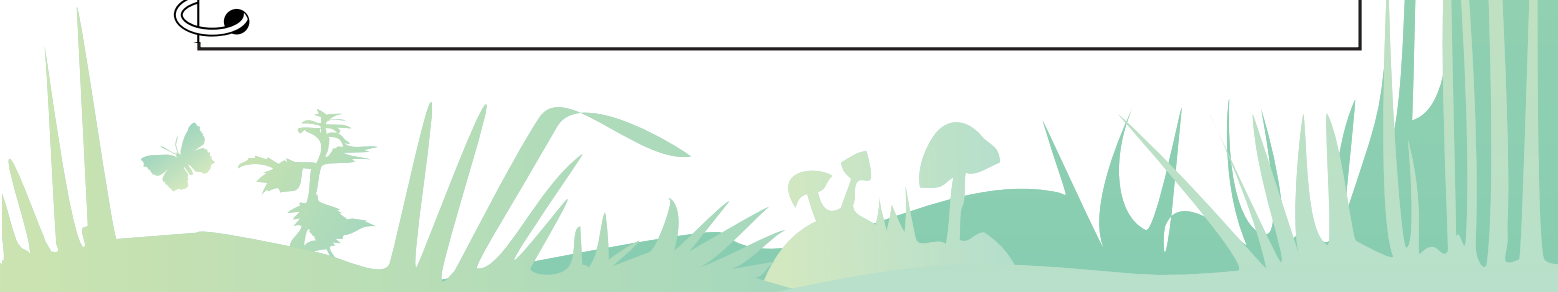
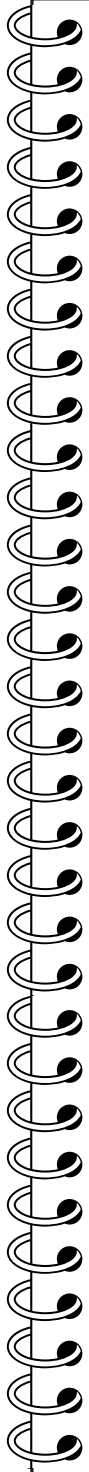
2. Weeping Willow and Crack willow are not good for basket making.
Why?

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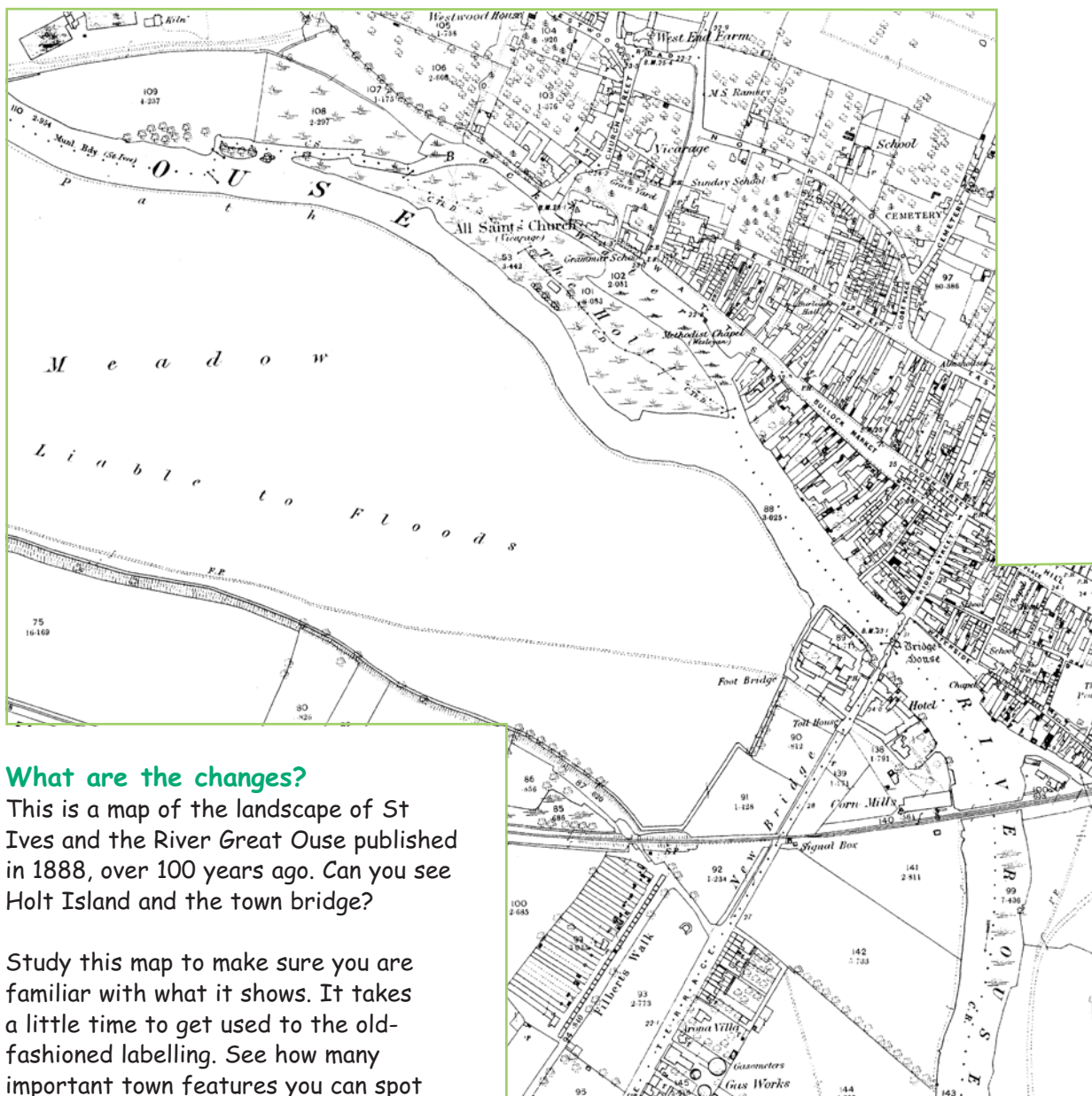
3. Willow can grow up to 2 m a year, and has many uses such as furniture making or for cricket bats. What else is willow used for?

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4. Willow trees provide food and shelter for over 400 species of bird, animal and insects. Draw a picture to show a creature benefitting from willow on Holt Island.



THEN AND NOW



What are the changes?

This is a map of the landscape of St Ives and the River Great Ouse published in 1888, over 100 years ago. Can you see Holt Island and the town bridge?

Study this map to make sure you are familiar with what it shows. It takes a little time to get used to the old-fashioned labelling. See how many important town features you can spot (you might find it useful to have a look at the ST IVES FROM THE AIR page).

Now, look at the up-to-date map of the same area. If you look carefully you will notice differences: some will be features on the old map that have now vanished; some will be new features on the modern map that did not exist on the old map.

Here are some questions to start you off noticing the differences between then and now:

1. Was there a bridge onto Holt Island?
Yes No
2. Is there one now?
Yes No

THEN AND NOW continued



3. Was there a swimming pool on Holt Island?

Yes No

4. Is there one now?

Yes No

5. What big building did the railway pass?

.....

6. Is the railway still there?

Yes No

7. Is the big building still there?

Yes No

8. Why is the town built on one side of the river only? The clue is in the old labelling!

.....

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Write here all the other differences you can see between the two maps:

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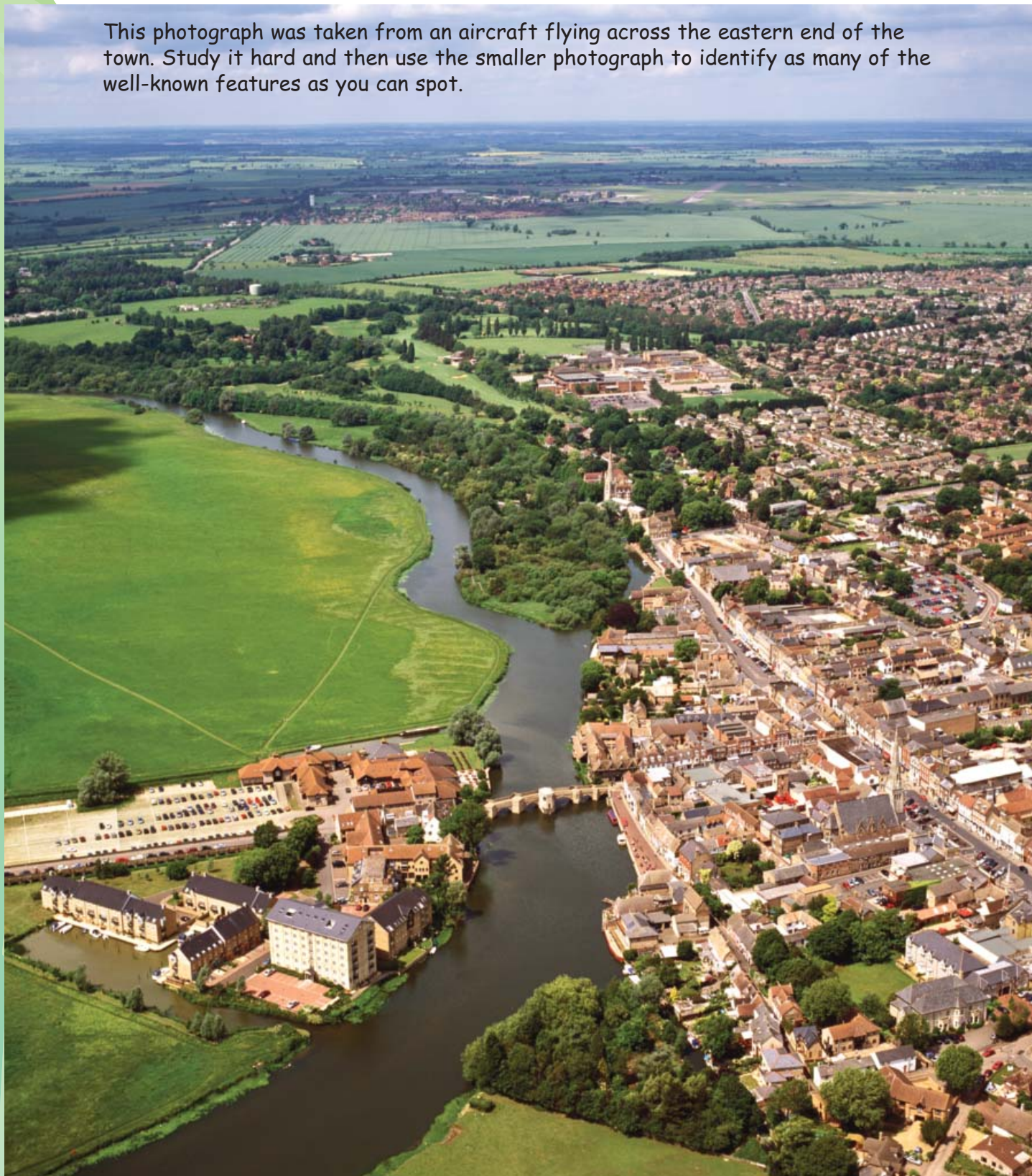
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CHANGING LANDSCAPES

ST IVES FROM THE AIR

This photograph was taken from an aircraft flying across the eastern end of the town. Study it hard and then use the smaller photograph to identify as many of the well-known features as you can spot.



ST IVES FROM THE AIR continued



Here are the features to identify: fill in the correct number in each circle.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Holt Island | 10. The Free Church |
| 2. All Saints Parish Church | 11. The Quay |
| 3. The Town Bridge | 12. St Ivo School |
| 4. The Dolphin Hotel | 13. Nobles Field |
| 5. The Old Mill | 14. The Thicket |
| 6. Hemingford Meadow | 15. Wilhorn Meadow |
| 7. The Broadway | 16. River Great Ouse |
| 8. Bridge Street | 17. The Backwater |
| 9. Market Hill | 18. The Waits |

SURVEY SHEET

How do you rate the island? Use this Environmental and Leisure Assessment form to compare and contrast the Nature Reserve with another location of your choice within the town.

First Location

Second Location

Holt Island Nature Reserve

Time of survey from: to to

Weather conditions to

Number of people seen to

Look around in your area and note the following:

Facilities for visitors

(litter bins, notices, toilets etc)

Evidence of management (paths

vegetation, fencing, planting etc)

Evidence of general damage

(erosion, rabbits/deer etc)

Evidence of purposeful damage

(vandalism, graffiti etc)

Are there any links between the issues in the table above?

For example, can you see evidence of management which aims to reduce human impact?

.....

.....

Grade the following based on your opinion of the areas you are looking at.

✓ one number for each location, for each category.

Issue	First	Second	Issue	First	Second
Litter			Interest		
5 - a lot of litter			5 - All the same/boring		
4			4		
3 - Quite a lot			3 - Quite a lot of variety		
2			2		
1 - Very little litter			1 - Lots of variety & interest		
Appearance			Human impact		
5 - Unattractive			5 - Negative impact		
4			4		
3 - Quite attractive			3 - Neutral impact		
2			2		
1 - Attractive			1 - Positive impact		
Noise			Footpaths		
5 - Very noisy			5 - Artificial surface		
4			4 - Natural - bad damage		
3 - Quite noisy			3 - Natural - quite a lot of erosion		
2			2 - Natural - some erosion		
1 - Very little noise			1 - Natural - hardly any erosion/none		

SURVEY SHEET continued

Read through this before you walk around the Island, then fill it in as you walk

Recreational activity	Present?	Evidence	Possible/actual impacts	Evidence of how impacts have been or could be addressed
Dog walking				
Mountain bike riding				
Flower studies				
Fishing				
Horse riding				
BBQ's				
Boating				
Education				
Bird watching				
Picnics				

Now you have had chance to explore, what do you think of Holt Island Nature Reserve?

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ANSWERS

WONDERFUL WILLOW WORKSHEET

1. **Harrison Willow** planted on Holt Island by the Harrison Family, is red in colour and good for basket weaving. **Golden Osier** is very hardy and good for adding patterns to baskets as its golden colour contrasts well with many green barked willows.
2. **Weeping Willow & Crack Willow** crack when bent.
3. Fruit baskets, laundry baskets, sorting baskets for mail, fences, coracles, baskets for bikes and hot air balloons, and frames for soldiers Busby hats.

THEN AND NOW

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| 1. No | 8. Because it is slightly higher than the other side and is less likely to flood. |
| 2. Yes | |
| 3. No | |
| 4. Yes | Other differences: |
| 5. The Old Mill | No houses along Filbert's Walk now |
| 6. No | Dolphin Hotel now |
| 7. Yes | Mooring basin at Dolphin Hotel now |

ST IVES FROM THE AIR

