



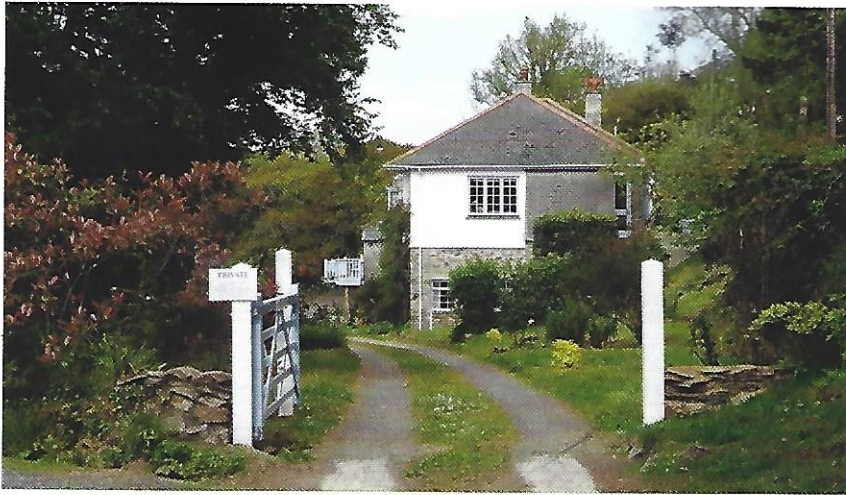
Perfect harmony

With its picturesque charm and fascinating backstory, it's hard not to fall in love with the riverside idyll that is **Bishops Quay**. Words by *Imogen Clements*.

There are few stories more romantic than the history of Bishops Quay at St Martin in West Cornwall. This beautiful property (comprising two houses) in a jewel of a location on the banks of the River Helford, dates back to 1947 when, just after the war, a Commander Kirby was sailing up the estuary in an old Dutch barge with his wife looking for a place where they could settle and operate a yachting business from. They misjudged the tide and got stuck in the mud at the mouth of Mawgan Creek, adjacent to an old three-storey barn and quay. "My parents-in-law saw this barn and immediately fell in love with it," reveals Kate Kirby, the current owner. "They enquired and it turned out it was a storage barn where farmers would send fleeces or

product away down the river, or where deliveries would be received up the river destined for local farms. It was part of the Trelowarren estate. My father-in-law rented it initially from the estate, before acquiring it to turn into the family home. My husband was born and raised there. He then met me and we acquired the old kiln adjacent to the barn and converted that to our family home."

The kiln is around 400 years old and was used to extract lime from limestone brought up river. The second generation Kirbys built over the kiln and ran a commercial fishing business from the quay as they raised their own family. The first house – the three-storey barn – became a holiday home when the grandmother passed away. "There is an internal staircase that connects the two, which is really convenient when we need to do



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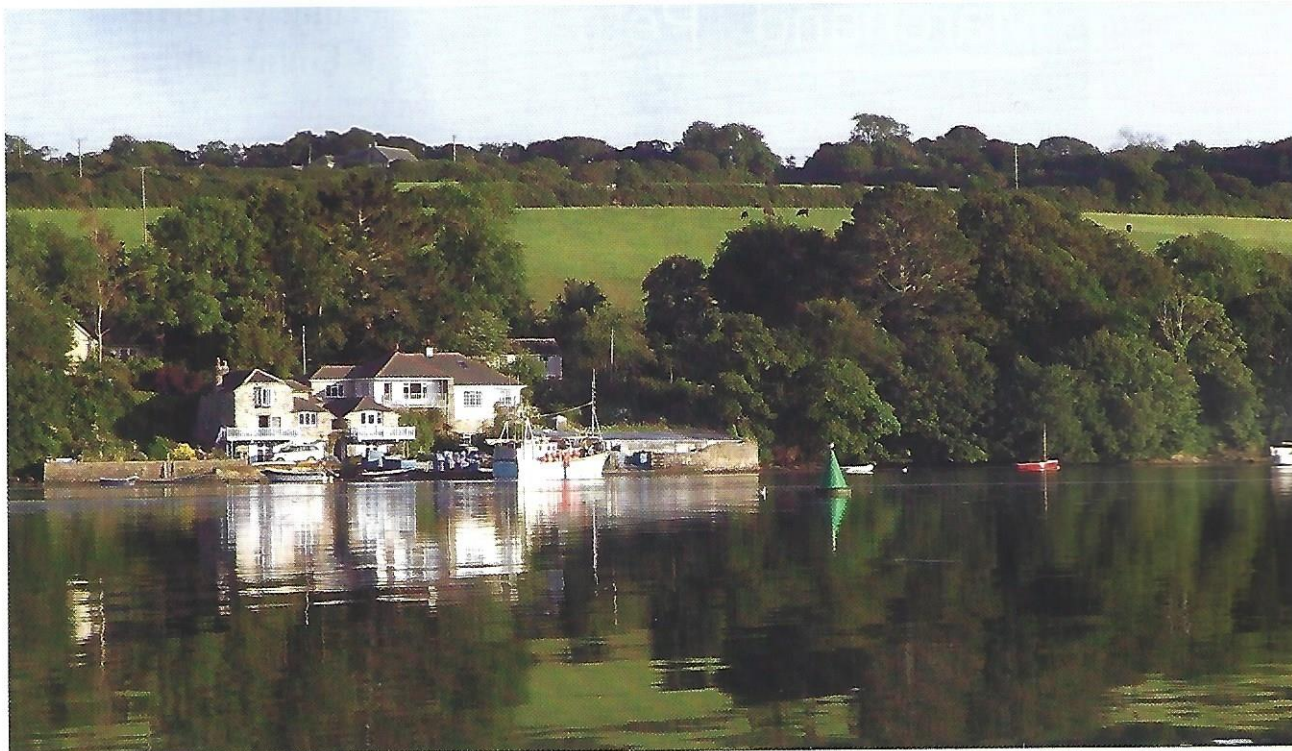
changeovers, but we also use that house for families and parties when it's not being let out. The interconnecting staircase means that should anyone wish to, they could create one large home out of the two buildings.”

So, Bishops Quay has been in the family for 70 years, through two generations, and holds many happy memories. Roly Kirby, grandson to Commander Kirby, and now a commercial fisherman himself, tells of an idyllic childhood of messing about on the water. “It was a fantastic place to grow up. We used to have regattas every summer with other children who lived on the river. They'd come and we'd have lots of boat races. It was very 'swallows and amazons', lots of camping out in the fields. And it's safe: calm, flat water to learn on. Both houses look straight out onto the river and our parents could keep an eye on us from the balconies. I remember my father would tie a long rope to my boat when I was little. We used to

get home from school on a sunny evening and when the tide was in we'd take the boat out. When it was out we'd lark around in the mud, slipping and sliding down the banks. As we got older we'd sail to the pub by boat. There are five pubs accessible from the house: a café and pub at Gweek, The Shipwrights Arms, The Ferry Boat, Port Navas Yacht Club and the Helford River Sailing Club. You can do a lap and catch the tide back up to watch the phosphorescence in the water on your way home. Most of the holiday-makers who come use the boats and do just that. It's quite a magical experience.”

It is a dream holiday home. A place such as this, on the waterfront, with four bedrooms on a wide strip of estuary that boasts beautiful views, stunning birdlife, boats, terraces and gardens down to the water, must be a draw for most. I'm told that Bishops Quay generates an annual income that would exceed many London salaries.





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And there are other potential revenue-generating opportunities. The property comes with six acres of land backing onto the water. “We’ve all used the fields for our weddings,” reveals Roly. “You can park on the land and hold a sizeable event – we’ve 300 people at a time. Because the land backs onto the waterfront, guests would arrive by boat, catching the tide, as would the bride and groom.”

Accessing Bishops Quay by road is just as pleasant. A private quarter of a mile-long drive leads down to the property: “When you’re going down the lane, you feel like you’re entering a wonderland where everything stops.”

Such a location may sound secluded but it’s far from it. There is a thriving community connected by the river, not least as a result of the various yacht clubs. The market town of Helston is just a 10-minute drive; Falmouth, the arty, university harbour town is half an hour away; and the city of Truro, where one of the Kirby children went to school each day, is under 40 minutes by car. That’s assuming you want to go by car; by boat to all three is, of course, doable.

A property such as this, that offers so much and has been in the family for so long must be a wrench to leave. “It is,” agrees Roly. “My grandmother used to say how the view was constantly changing with the seasons and

the tide, bringing different birds at different times of the year. We’ve done every kind of boating from there – sailing dinghies, paddleboarding... I had a racing yacht and used to keep it there. There is a long boat shed where we would store all the boats in the winter and repair them.” There are various other store sheds with power beneath each of the houses.

Ask Kate what she will miss most, and she replies: “The tranquillity of the place.” That is the beauty and universal appeal of estuaries. They’re spellbinding because of the gentle ebb and flow of wide expanses of water, lapping the bank to invite you in. There’s no crashing, no constant back and forth of waves. I’m reminded of something I once read about feng shui – that ancient Chinese theory that connects energy forces to a home’s supposed harmony. It said that the best place for a home is in the shallow valley that has a river running by it. It moves the energy through calmly, never allowing it to stagnate but always renewing. There’s something in that, I reckon, and judging by the length of time this property has been in one family, and the number of people who come there to experience the very best time out, Bishops Quay is quite possibly the most idyllic and restorative of locations. ■

Bishops Quay comprises two homes, interconnected, of four and three bedrooms respectively. It is on the market at a guide price of £3,000,000 with Jonathan Cunliffe.

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