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Teignmouth (/tɛɪnmʊθ/ TIN-mʊth) is a town and civil parish in Teignbridge in the English county of Devon, situated on the north bank of the estuary mouth of the River Teign about 14 miles south of Exeter. It has a population of 14,413.[1] In 1690, it was the last place in England to be invaded by a foreign power. The town grew from a fishing port associated with the Newfoundland cod industry to a fashionable resort of some note in Georgian times, with further expansion after the opening of the South Devon Railway in 1846. Today, its port still operates and the town remains a popular seaside holiday location.

The first record of Teignmouth, Tengemuða, meaning mouth of the stream, was in 1044.[2] Nonetheless settlements very close by are attested earlier, with the banks of the Teign estuary having been in Saxon hands since at least 682, a battle between the Ancient Britons and Saxons being recorded on Haldon in 927, and Danish raids having occurred on the Teign estuary in 1001.

There were originally two villages, East and West Teignmouth, separated by a stream called the Tame, which emptied into the Teign through marshland by the current fish quay.[3] Neither village is mentioned in the Domesday Book, but East Teignmouth was granted a market by charter in 1253 and one for West Teignmouth followed a few years later.[4] The Tame now runs under the town in culverts and is only visible higher up the town as Brimley Brook, joined by smaller streams such as the Winterbourne (an intermittent stream, which flows only in winter or after heavy rain).

Documents indicate that Teignmouth was a significant port by the early 14th century, second in Devon only to Dartmouth.[5] It was attacked by the French in 1340 and sent seven ships and 120 men to the expedition against Calais in 1347.[6] Its relative importance waned during the 15th century, and it did not figure in an official record of 1577. This may have been due to silting up of the harbour caused by tin mining on Dartmoor.[7]

During the 17th century, in common with other Channel ports, Teignmouth ships suffered from raids from Dunkirkers, which operated as privateers from Flemish ports. It is possible that smuggling was the town's most significant trade at this time, though cod fishing in Newfoundland was also of great importance.[8]

In July 1690, after the French Admiral Anne Hilarion de Tourville defeated an Anglo-Dutch fleet at the Battle of Beachy Head, the French fleet was anchored in Torbay and some of the galley fleet travelled the short distance up the coast and attacked Teignmouth. A petition to the Lord Lieutenant from the inhabitants described the incident:

... on the 26th day of this instant July 1690 by Four of the clocke in the morning, your poor petitioners were invaded (by the French) to the number of 1,000 or thereabouts, who in the space of three hours tyme, burnt down to the ground the dwelling houses of 240 persons of our parish and upwards, plundered and carried away all our goods, defaced our churches, burnt ten of our ships in the harbour, besides fishing boats, netts and other fishing craft ...

by the late horrid invasion there were within the space of 12 houres burnt downe and consumed 116 dwelling houses ... and also 172 dwelling houses were rifled and plundered and two parish churches much ruined, plundred and defaced, besides the burning of ten saile of shippes with the furniture thereof, and the goods and merchandise therein ...

As a result The Crown issued a church brief that authorised the collection of £11,000 for the aid of the town. Churches from as far afield as Yorkshire contributed, and the collections enabled the further development of the port.[9] This was the last invasion of England,[notes 1][9] and French Street with its museum is named in memory of the occasion.

All Gentlemen Seamen and Able Landmen who delight in the Music of Great Guns and distressing the Enemies of Great Britain have now a fine opportunity of making their Fortunes by entering on Board The Dragon Privateer ... now ready to be launch'd in the Harbour of Teignmouth... Any persons capable of beating a Drum or blowing a French horn shall have great encouragement.

In the late 18th century, privateering was common in Teignmouth, as it was in other westcountry ports. In 1779 the French ship L'Emulation with a cargo of sugar, coffee and cotton was offered for sale at "Rendle's Great Sale Room" in the town. Teignmouth people fitted out two privateers: the Dragon with 16 guns and 70 men; and the Bellona, described as carrying "16 guns, 4 cohorns and 8 swivels".[10] The Bellona set sail on her first voyage in September 1779, and was "oversett in a violent Gust of Wind" off Dawlish with the loss of 25 crew members.[11]

The Newfoundland fisheries continued to provide the main employment into the early 19th century and, fortuitously for the town, as the fisheries declined the prospect of tourism arose. A tea house was built on the Den in 1787 amongst the local fishermen's drying nets. The "Amazons of Shaldon" – muscular women who pulled fishing nets and were "naked to the knee" – were an early tourist attraction for male tourists.[12] By 1803 Teignmouth was called a "fashionable watering place", and the resort continued to develop during the 19th century. Its two churches were rebuilt soon after 1815 and in the 1820s the first bridge across the estuary to Shaldon was built; George Templer's New Quay opened at the port; and the esplanade, Den Crescent and the central Assembly Rooms (later the cinema) were laid out. The railway arrived in 1846 and the pier was built 1865–7.[13]

The First World War had a disruptive effect on Teignmouth: over 175 men from the town lost their lives and many businesses did not survive. In the 1920s as the economy started to recover, a golf course opened on Little Haldon; the Morgan Giles shipbuilding business was established, and charabancs took employees and their families for annual outings to Dartmoor and elsewhere. By the 1930s the town was again thriving, and with the Haldon Aerodrome and School of Flying nearby, Teignmouth was advertised as the only south coast resort offering complete aviation facilities.[15]

During the Second World War Teignmouth suffered badly from "tip and run" air raids.[3] It was bombed 21 times between July 1940 and February 1944 and 79 people were killed, 151 wounded, 228 houses were destroyed and over 2,000 damaged in the raids.[16] Teignmouth's hospital was bombed during a raid on 8 May 1941, killing three nurses and seven patients. It was rebuilt and reopened in September 1954, making it the first complete general hospital in the country to be built after the formation of the National Health Service.[17]

The Old Quay was built in the mid-18th century on land leased from Lord Clifford. The opening of the Stover Canal by James Templer in 1792[19] provided a boost to the port due to the ease with which ball clay could be transported from the mines north of Newton Abbot. After travelling along the

canal the barges continued down the estuary to the port. By 1820 this trade was supplemented by granite from the quarries near Haytor on Dartmoor carried via the unique granite-tracked Haytor Granite Tramway which was linked to the Stover Canal. The granite to build the new London Bridge came via this route and was sent from the New Quay, which had been built for this traffic in 1821â€“25 by George Templer, James's son.[20]

Teignmouth has a tradition of shipbuilding from the 17th century. By the turn of the 19th century there were three shipyards in Teignmouth, and three in Shaldon and Ringmore on the opposite side of the estuary.[22] The industry declined in the early 20th century, but in 1921 Morgan Giles bought the last derelict shipbuilding yard and gave the industry a new stimulus. His shipyard became a major employer, building pleasure craft in peacetime and small craft such as torpedo boats during World War II. The business failed in 1968 not long after Donald Crowhurst's attempt to sail around the world.[23]

The Shipwrecked Fishermen and Mariners' Royal Benevolent Society sent a lifeboat to Teignmouth in 1851 and kept it in a boathouse on the beach near the Custom House. In 1854 the society transferred its lifeboats to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI). A new boathouse was provided on The Den with doors facing the harbour which was used until 1940. After a gap of fifty years, on 3 November 1990, the RNLI reopened Teignmouth Lifeboat Station with an Atlantic 21 inshore lifeboat.[24]

The original bridge was owned by the Teignmouth and Shaldon Bridge Company and opened on 8 June 1827.[25] It had 34 wooden arches and was 1,671 feet long, which made it the longest wooden bridge in England when built. It had abutment walls of a considerable length at either end, and a swing bridge at the Teignmouth end to allow sailing ships to pass up the estuary.[26] It cost around Â£19,000 to build, but the overall expenditure was about Â£26,000 due to the costs of the necessary Act of Parliament and the purchase of the old ferry-rights.[27] Toll houses were built at each end of the bridge, and the one on the Teignmouth side survives.[28]

After eleven years, on 27 June 1838 the centre arches of the bridge collapsed, the timbers had been eaten through by shipworms.[29] It was rebuilt in wood and reopened in 1840, but it partially collapsed again in 1893.[28] The bridge was completely rebuilt between 1927 and 1931, using steel for the piers and main girders and concrete for most of the deck, except for the opening span which used timber.[30]

On 28 October 1948 Devon County Council bought the bridge from the Shaldon Bridge Company for Â£92,020 and tolls were abolished.[30] The original paintwork was inadequate to deal with the environment, and repairs were required in 1960 and in 1980.[31] In 1998 it was discovered that the bridge had severe structural defects and work to correct this continued until 2002, the bridge remaining open throughout.[26] After this work was completed, residents nearby noticed that in certain wind conditions the bridge "whistles". As of 2007[update] the problem had not been solved.[32]

Teignmouth railway station, which opened in 1846, is close to the town centre. It lies between the stations of Dawlish and Newton Abbot on the Great Western Main Line between London Paddington and Penzance in Cornwall. In 2010/11 it recorded 505,000 passengers, making it the second busiest station on the Riviera Line after Newton Abbot.

The line built by Isambard Kingdom Brunel runs along the South Devon Railway sea wall which is a stone embankment between the sea and cliffs that runs for several miles between Teignmouth and Dawlish Warren. This line was originally both broad gauge and worked by the atmospheric system, with steam pump houses at regular intervals to create the vacuum. It was not successful for a host of reasons and was converted to normal steam locomotive working. Redundant sections of the atmospheric railway pipes were used as drains all over Teignmouth. One was set in the roadside in Woodway Lane, near Woodway House.

In December 1852 a large landslide from the cliffs east of the town caused the railway to close for

four days,[33] and in 1855 and 1859 the sea broke through the line at Teignmouth.[34] There have been many more closures since, caused both by landslips from the cliffs and breaches by the sea, especially in winter. In 2010 the sea walls and adjoining estuaries were costing Network Rail around £500,000 per year to maintain.[35] In 1936 the Great Western Railway surveyed an inland deviation between Exminster and Bishopsteignton and a shorter route starting near Dawlish Warren, but the advent of World War 2 brought these projects to an end.[36]

The town is located on the north bank of the mouth of the estuary of the River Teign, at the junction of the A379 coast road, the A381 road to Newton Abbot, and the B3192 which climbs up to the A380 on Haldon and hence on to the M5 12 miles away. Teignmouth is linked to Shaldon, the village on the opposite bank, by a passenger ferry at the river mouth and by a road bridge further upstream. The red sandstone headland on the Shaldon side called "The Ness" is the most recognisable symbol of the town from the seaward side.

In the harbour area was the Salty, a small flat island created through dredging operations but levelled, supposedly to improve natural scouring of the main channel for shipping, in recent years to leave a large tidal sand bank frequented by seabirds and cockle-collectors. Salmon nets are still employed by locals, especially near Shaldon Bridge.

Teignmouth is situated on the coast of Devon, a peninsula of South West England. It has a mild maritime climate. Prevailing winds across the south-west of England are from the west. Teignmouth lies to the east of Dartmoor, in a lee / rainshadow, with mean temperatures 3°C (5°F) higher and less than 43% of the rainfall of Princetown, which is located on Dartmoor.[38] It receives 133 millimetres (5.2 in) less precipitate per year than nearby Plymouth, which is located on the south-west coast of Devon.[39]

Owing to its proximity to the sea, Teignmouth has warmer winters with less frost and snow, as well as slightly cooler summers compared with inland areas of southern England. January is usually the coldest month in Britain; however, sea temperatures usually reach their minimum temperature in late February, which affects Teignmouth's climate, making February its coldest month. The first frost in Teignmouth usually occurs in late November or early December, whereas midland areas of England sometimes have frosts as early as September.[38]

Snow is rare during the start of the winter season in December. Late autumn and early winter is the wettest time of the year, because sea temperatures are still relatively high and deep Atlantic depressions bring moist air across the South West. On average, July is the driest month, but summer thunderstorms can occasionally deposit more than the month's mean rainfall in one day. Teignmouth has average daily sunshine totals of over 7 hours in summer and around 2 hours in winter. Sunshine totals reflect the hours of daylight and the fluctuations of the Azores high, which is most powerful in summer.[38] The climate patterns also implicate a less pronounced cooler mediterranean climate (csa/ csb) influence which is due to the decrease in precipitation centred over the summer period and surplus rainfall during the winter.

Den Crescent and its central Assembly Rooms, laid out in 1826 by Andrew Patey of Exeter, still survive relatively unchanged today.[13] The Assembly Rooms were the hub of the town's social life in the 19th century and lavish balls took place in the 70 ft (21 m) long ballroom. In 1871, the building was taken over by the East Devon and Teignmouth Club which had an exclusive membership taken from the gentry and professional middle class.[15] In 1934 it was converted into the Riviera Cinema, in which guise it continued until 2000; part of the building has now been converted into flats.[41]

The town's parish church, dedicated to St. James is unusual, being octagonal in shape.[notes 2] A story from Cornwall suggests why these churches are rounded, for the villagers of Veryan built several circular houses so that the Devil had no corners in which to lie in wait for unsuspecting occupants and these buildings were therefore 'Devil-proof'. [42] The church of St Michael the Archangel is in the east of the town. St. Scholastica's Abbey, on the road to Dawlish, built in 1864 by Henry Woodyer is a notable Gothic Revival building, and the Roman Catholic Church, on the same road, is a late work by Joseph Hansom, the inventor of the hansom cab.[3]

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