

## **Tourism – The Coming of the Railway and East Devon**

Because of its size, this thematic guide is split into three parts, each with the same introduction and list of references:

- 1: The Coming of the Railway, and East Devon
- 2: South Devon and Dartmoor
- 3: North Devon and Historical Buildings

Tourism in Devon was established in the mid eighteenth century, with Exmouth and Teignmouth developing in the 1750s, and Sidmouth, Dawlish and Ilfracombe in the 1770s. The facilities at this time were very rudimentary, although cures for a variety of illnesses and ailments by sea bathing and the imbibing of sea water were promoted with great enthusiasm. Exmouth introduced the bathing machine in 1759, with Teignmouth following a few years later in 1762. The declaration of war with France, which meant that travel on the continent became virtually impossible, and the desire of the Englishman to tour or winter in a mild climate altered the situation radically, and forced them to look elsewhere for these pursuits. The newly emerging watering places of the South West were to fulfil these needs. Even the threat of war brought new and immediate economic benefits to Devon. The naval facilities built at Devonport and later the breakwater, became objects of interest to the tourist, as they gazed on the with a mixture of patriotic pride and an appreciation of our industrial expertise.

Roads in the county were in a poor state. As late as the 1750s Devon had no turnpike trusts and in 1760 it still took four days to travel the 170 miles from London to Exeter. As coaching and the roads improved the time taken to travel this time was greatly reduced, (1764: 48 hours, 1783: 32 hours and 1785: 24 hours) and by the end of the coaching era the Exeter Telegraph had reduced the journey time down to 17 hours. But even after arrival at one of the major towns, travelling elsewhere in the county could be very slow. North Devon was particularly difficult to reach, with coach journeys from Exeter to Barnstaple (39 miles) taking almost the whole day. It was not until the 1830s that Ilfracombe and the other North Devon resorts were accessible on good roads, many earlier visitors had preferred to travel by sea to reach them, using the steam packets from Bristol and Swansea. All this was to change with the arrival of the railways, which opened up the county and its watering places to a wider cross-section of society.

From Exeter the South Devon Railway had by the end of 1848 opened up the resorts of Torquay and Plymouth to an influx of tourists. In 1854 the North Devon railway took the line up to Barnstaple and by the 1870s a network of branch lines connected the smaller towns like Dartmouth, Exmouth, Seaton, Sidmouth, Ilfracombe and Bideford to the main lines.

With the increase of visitors there came an improvement in the economy, allowing local entrepreneurs to add better facilities for the visitor to enjoy. The Devon resorts were transformed from small fishing villages into sophisticated spas, with assembly rooms,

libraries, theatres, promenades and purpose built accommodation, which not only attracted the sick but the fashionable as well. The climate was also a great attraction often being less severe and kinder to the infirm than elsewhere in the country. Works of literature also had an effect on the popularity of the region, and the descriptions of Devonshire scenery in the works of Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* (1855) and R.D. Blackmore's *Lorna Doone* (1869) brought curious visitors to the region. In the 1860s a local entrepreneur created the holiday resort of Westward Ho! to capitalise on the popularity of Kingsley's novel.

Tourism is still an important contributor to Devon's economy, indeed it has a major influence not only on the economic but also the social and environmental well-being of the area. The subsequent recirculation of this wealth within the local economy supports a whole range of ancillary manufacturing and service industries. Thereby a substantial portion of the country's employment has long been generated.

## 1. The Coming of the Railway and Its Effect on Tourism

- *The Teignmouth Guide*

The development of nearly all the water-places in the kingdom may with truth be said to date from the introduction of railway travelling. Prior to that epoch an annual visit to the seaside was a luxury almost exclusively reserved for the nobility and landed proprietary, by whom a frequent change of residence alternating between town and country was regarded as an essential in fashionable life. The hard-working student or professional man, might, indeed, at much sacrifice of means and personal comfort, avail himself of such a delightful source of relaxation; or the invalid, at the recommendation of his medical adviser, might be persuaded to take a journey to some place on the coast, in the hope of prolonging existence, or recovering from some tedious and wearisome illness. But to the bulk of the middle-classes residing in towns this species of enjoyment, now so common was almost, if not altogether denied; and unless in places easily accessible to the sea quite unthought of.

The difficulty of travel and the vast preparations necessary for anything partaking of a lengthened journey, were in themselves formidable obstacles; beside which they stay-at-home habits of our forefathers were unfavourable to excursions of this sort. Connected with these were other causes of a pecuniary nature which may in those days have curbed the desire often, no doubt, ardently experienced to indulge in a season of sea-bathing. The amazing wealth that has poured into the country during the last half-century, coupled with the extreme facility of locomotion we have enjoyed in the interim, have, however, created quite a revolution in the habits of the English people; and now, a few weeks' or months' sojourn at the sea-side is regarded as indispensable by most families of respectability or standing. Every nook and corner of our coasts have been ransacked to furnish sites available for the purpose of bathing. Fishing hamlets have been transformed as by an enchanter's wands into populous towns, and venerable villages regard with an astonishment little short of awe the grand erections and the rushing trains, which have superseded the few humble dwellings and tardy means of communication familiar with their early days.

The first part of the kingdom that felt the effects of the new impulse was the South Coast of Devon. Its peculiarly mild and equable temperament had long pointed it out as possessing qualities eminently adapting it as a residence for invalids and persons of delicate constitutions; while its broad expanse of ocean and highly diversified scenery recommended it to the summer tourist and visitor, as a place where every yearning of our nature could be supplied. Hence arose the many summer resorts which now stud the coast from one extremity to the other, and although similar influences have been the means of calling into existence innumerable rivals in other parts of this and neighbouring counties, the watering-places of South Devon still maintain their pre-eminence.



Image 1(a) SC0590, Dawlish, J S & Co, 1855

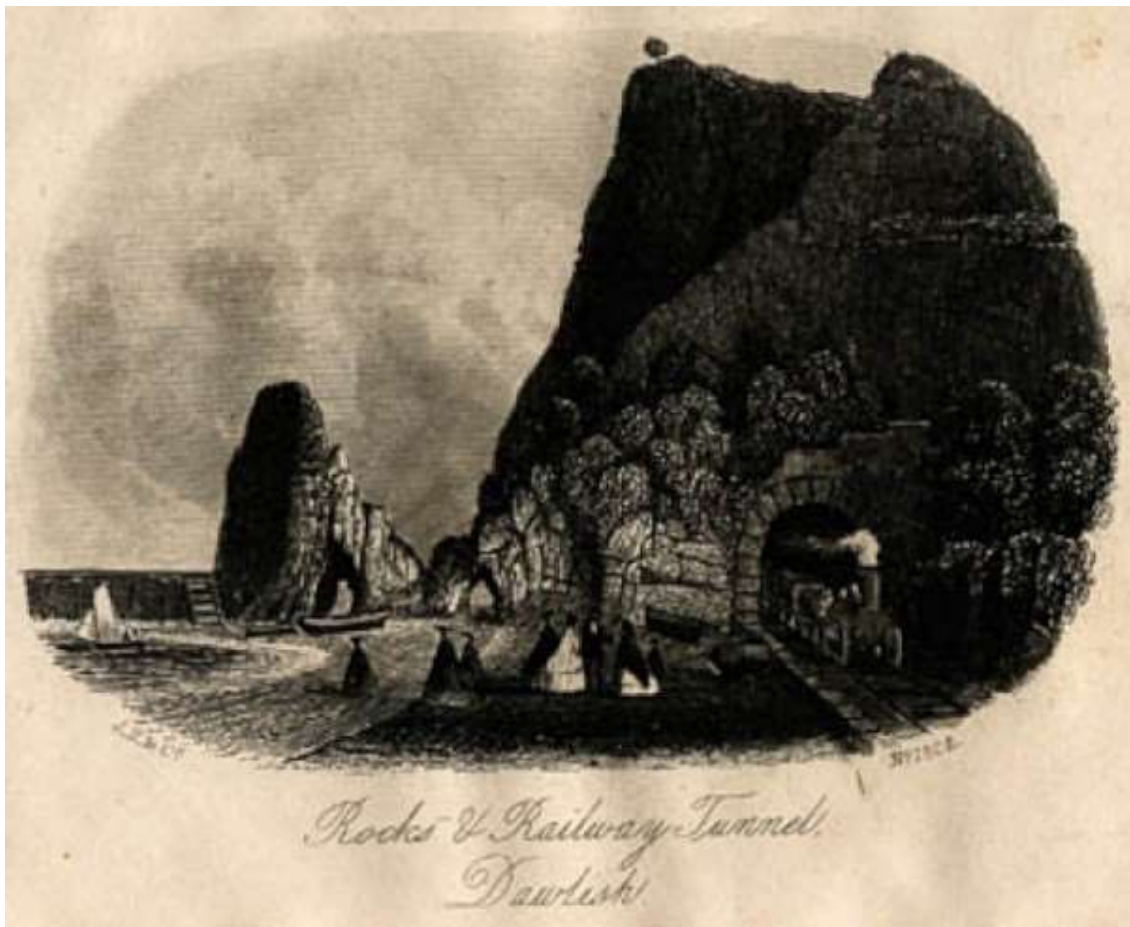


Image 1(b) SC0623, Rocks & Railway Tunnel, Dawlish, J S & Co, 1860





Image 1(c) SC0619, The Parson and Clerk Rock, Newman & Co, 1850

## 2. Sidmouth

- *Devonshire Sketches Including Pixie Lore*  
Tickler (alias Elias Tozer)  
Exeter: Devon Weekly Times Office, 1871, p. 58, 59

Some years ago, before railways were constructed (at least in this county), Sidmouth was, *par excellence*, the Water place of Devonshire. Royalty patronised it, died in it, was born in it – for did not the Duke of Kent sojourn in Woolbrooke Glen, and ‘give up the ghost’ there; and was not Queen Victoria born there? If not, the early days of her childhood were passed in Sidmouth; and I believe the fair town as still a share in her royal heart. When the Duke and Duchess of Kent arrived in the town, of course the inhabitants were much impressed with the honour. They appointed a deputation to wait upon their royal highnesses, and one of the spokesmen addressing the Duke, said ‘- I hope your Lordship and Mrs Kent are well!’ The Duke smiled and ‘was happy to say that he and the Duchess were very well’. At this gracious answer the aforesaid spokesman rubbed his hands and exclaimed ‘that’s brave!’...

Time and weather permitting, I like the journey from the old city to Sidmouth better than that to most other watering places on the coast, although it may be more inconvenient. I have gone thither wholly by road, and partly by rail and road. Very pleasant is the journey either way. When I last visit Sidmouth I took rail to Ottery-road, per South Western Railway, and thence ‘bussed’ it through the somewhat famous town of Ottery St Mary (made so chiefly by the hallowed name of Coleridge),

and over several miles of pleasant turnpike road, with hedgerows on either side, festooned with the wild-rose and honeysuckle, and away in the distance noble heights, sloping woodlands and green – now, by drought, rather yellow – meadows. A nine miles' ride outside a 'bus', on a bright summer morning, with agreeable companions, was not the least element of enjoyment on my day's outing.

- *A Descriptive Sketch of Sidmouth*

Theodore H Mogridge

Sidmouth: J Harvey, 1836, pp. 121-124

It is well said that 'a man may be merry upon principle, and occasionally take a laugh as others do a walk, for the benefit of his health'. Cheerfulness and hilarity, when unprovoked by unwholesome incentives, undegraded by brutality, or untainted by licentiousness, may be prescribed as one of the means of urging a lazy circulation. Sidmouth is much admired by those who are inclined to mingle retirement with the occasional amusement.

### **Hunting**

Two packs of hounds are kept in the place, by James Peel Cockburn Esq and Henry Carew Esq, and two packs in the immediate neighbourhood by the Right Honourable Lord Rolle, and John Guppy Esq. Information at what place and time the hounds throw off, may generally be obtained by referring to a card at the reading room or at the post office

### **Racing**

There is a race course upon Salcome Hill, which however, is but seldom used by the lovers of the Turf.

### **Fishing**

The River Otter, a few miles from hence will furnish sufficient employment for those who think with Isaac Walton, that:

*Of recreation there is none  
So free as fishing is alone;  
All other pastime do no less  
Then mind the body both possess;  
My hand alone my work can do,  
So I can fish and study too.*

### **Shooting**

Save the sport resulting from the destruction of Sea Gulls, Merles, Cormorants, and other aquatic birds which frequent the coast, the stranger sportsman will find that it is the same here as in other places, that all the game is plentiful, his gun will be useless unless he has obtained the permission of some landed proprietors to shoot over their grounds.

Another species of healthy and manly amusement consists in the game of Cricket, for which the Fort Field is appropriated. The Club, consisting of many of the gentleman of Sidmouth and its vicinity, meet every Tuesday at eleven o'clock, from May until

the end of August; and during an interval of the game dine together in the cricket house, a comfortable and convenient building erected in the field by the members.

For sailing and fishing in the bay, every facility is furnished, by the careful and obliging fishermen of the place. Picnic parties visit the Marine Villa of T L Fish Esq. Pedestrian, assination and equestrian excursions to the interesting places in the adjacent country hereafter particularized furnish other pleasurable employment of time.

Above all many of the more serious and reflecting part of the company, will perhaps find the circulating libraries replete with the most rational and permanent pleasure. There are two established here, and the terms of subscription are extremely moderate; one kept by Mr Harvey, in the Fore Street, which is regularly supplied with the most esteemed and popular works, in various departments of literature, as soon as published; and the other by Mr Cawsey, pleasantly situated near the York Hotel, facing the sea; here the daily papers are to be read, and it is a fashionable lounge for both Ladies and Gentlemen. There is likewise a good billiard table. These with Balls held at the London Hotel Assembly Rooms, occasional Concerts, Promenades at the Cricket House, Fort Fields, every Tuesday evening during the season, and frequent Routs given by private parties, form the round of fashionable amusements of this place.



Image 2(a) SC2658, Sidmouth Western View, William Gauci, 1835

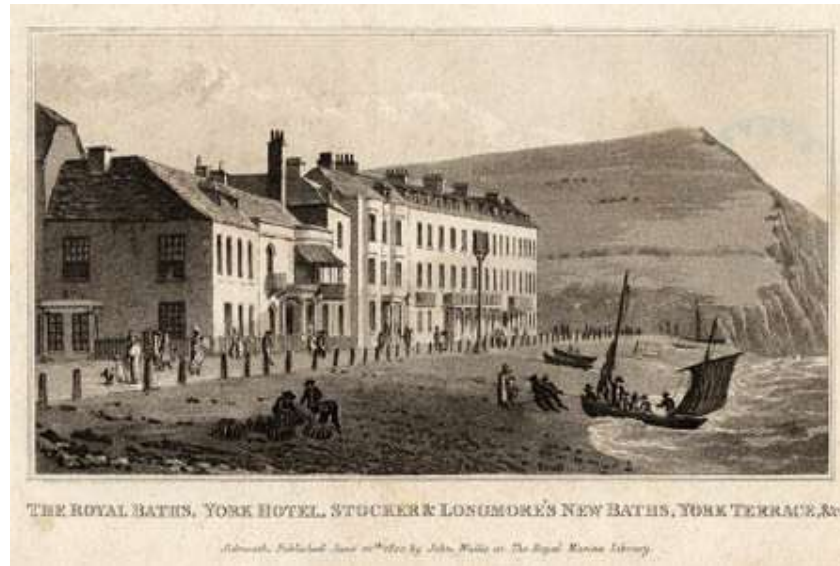


Image 2(b) SC2883-1, The Royal Baths York Hotel Stocker and Longmores New Baths, John Wallis, 1820



Image 2(c) SC2684, Sidmouth from Salcombe Hill, George Townsend, 1863





Image 2(d) SC2505, Esplanade Sidmouth Devon, Kershaw & Son, 1850



Image 2(e) SC0273, Buckfastleigh Abbey Devon, A McClatchie, 1829



Image 2(f) SC2671, Rabbit Shooting Park Hill Sidmouth, Rudolf Ackermann, 1819



Image 2(g) SC1772, Knowles Hill from the South Devon Cricket Ground, Newman & Co, 1855



Image 2(h) SC1086, The Bar Exmouth Devon, Rock & Co, 1859

### 3. Budleigh Salterton

- *Budleigh Salterton and Its Vicinity: A Hand Book for Visitors and Tourists*  
Salterton: W Baker, 1845 pp. 8-9

It sleeps, - for this expression can alone convey its calmness – in a well sheltered and well wooded recess, nearly midway on the magnificent coast which borders the English Channel, between Lyme Regis in Dorset, on the East, and the further extremity of Torbay; and forms one of that delightful series of summer resorts for the seekers of recreation, or winter retreats for the invalid, to be found also at Lyme, Seaton, and Sidmouth on the one side, and at Exmouth, Dawlish, Teignmouth, and Torquay on the other. Its distance from London is about 165 miles; a large portion of which is now however travelled over by the western railway; from the town of Honiton it is 16 miles; 6 miles from Sidmouth; 4 from Exmouth; 9 from Topsham, and 14 from Exeter. The village may be briefly described. It includes about 250 houses; a few of which are freehold, the remainder built on leasehold land, belonging to the property of the late Lord Rolle, and as a few ground leases are now granted, the advantages of its never being over-built may be hoped for, and reasonably expected. The main street, extending from east to west, is cheerful, clean and airy, it consists of a succession of cottages, which present an appearance of simplicity, cleanness, and comfort, interspersed with houses of greater importance, and shops in the various departments of trade.



- *Devonshire Sketches, Including Pixie Lore*  
Tickler (Alias Elias Tozer)  
Exeter : Devon Weekly Times Office, 1871, p. 29-30

There is every facility for bathing here, [Exmouth] under certain Local Board regulations. The proprietors, or 'proprietresses' of the bathing machines are permitted to occupy a portion of the beach, from which bathers, who do not hire a machine, are not allowed to dip. Outside a certain point however, persons may bath to their hearts' content. Some mistakes are now and again made; and woe betide the unlucky wight who ventures to trespass on the ground allotted to the reticent 'proprietresses' of these bathing machines. I was peacefully engaged in floating on the 'ocean waves', one fine morning, when I was suddenly made aware of a great stir in my vicinity. Looking about I saw the stalwart figure of a man, who had presumptuously undressed near the machines, who was floundering about like an innocent porpoise, thinking, I suppose, that the sea was 'free to all'. He was not permitted to indulge in this happy hallucination long, for the 'female proprietresses' were down upon him; and he was very soon glad to escape from the sea to his clothes, into which he quickly got and 'bolted'. Ambitious bathers sometimes come to grief. A facetious tradesman of Exeter, not a hundred miles from Queen-street, being unable to swim, and not relishing the taunts of small boys, hired a boat for the purpose of bathing 'out to sea'. He had provided himself with a 'belt'; which was warranted to sustain an elephant in any water. Unbounded faith in this apparatus led our adventurous friend to descend into deep water. If the 'belt' was capable of sustaining an elephant, it could not float him, so down he went to the bottom. The boatman, alarmed, instantly through of the mussel dredger, an article having several sharpish prongs attached to it. With this instrument of torture our poor friend was raised from a 'watery grave', and he is now the bearer of marks very similar to those which used to be borne by heretics in the 'good old times' of torture and persecution.



Image 3(a) SC0308, Budleigh Salterton from West Cliff, S Straker, 1830



Image 3(b) SC0322, Budleigh Salterton from East Cliff, Rock & Co, 1870





Image 3(c) SC1195, The Lady's Bathing Cover Ilfracombe, William Gauci, 1835



Image 3(d) SC3173, Bathing Cove Torquay, William Spreat, 1845

#### 4. Exmouth

- *Bounsall's Visitors' Guide to Exmouth, and the Various Places of Interest in the Neighbourhood*  
Exmouth, W M Bounsall, 1865, p. 4

About 150 years ago Exmouth was only a small hamlet occupied by fishermen. It was brought into repute by one of the Judges of the circuit who retired thither to bathe, when in a very infirm state of health, and received great benefit.

- *Freeman's Visitors' Hand-Book to Exmouth*  
Exmouth: T.Freeman, 1872. Pp.13-14

A few words with respect to the advantages of Exmouth as a watering-place. And first with respect to Climate, there can be no doubt that this town has a great deal to recommend it. It affords a climate more bracing than that of Torquay, while at the same time it is sheltered by a high-background from the severity of east and north-east winds. The atmosphere here is also less humid than in most other places of the South of Devon, the rain-clouds being largely diverted from it by the opposite range of the Haldon Hills. 'A Guide to the Sea-bathing places of England', published in 1813, thus speaks of Exmouth:

*The soil around Exmouth is dry and well-wooded, but not so much encumbered with trees as to check the circulation of air; which may, perhaps, be one cause why fogs are less frequent here than in many other places. The climate is so mild that winter seldom begins till after Christmas, neither does it usually continue above six weeks; and even during that period, deep snow is unknown, and severe frost uncommon. From the piercing winds of March, however, Exmouth is by no means exempt, though less exposed to their influence than either Teignmouth, Dawlish or Sidmouth. The night air at Exmouth is peculiarly dry and warm; the skies, during summer, resemble those in Italy; and the climate, though far inferior to that of Pisa, is in some respects like it by tending to promote insensible perspiration; and from its relating quality always befriending weak lungs.*

Mr Rammel, Government Sanitary Inspector, reported, in 1850, of Exmouth:

*The town lies completely open to the prevailing winds, which blowing from the south-west, are – although occasionally extremely violent – invariably mild in temperature, and it is in a great measure screened by the high land in its rear from the colder winds of the opposite quarter.*

Dr Shapter in his work 'On the Climate of the South of Devon' says of Exmouth:

*The climate partakes of the same character as that of the district, modified by the sea only. An inhabitant, to whose opinion I would defer thinks it more equable than any on the coast; and that this may in some measure*

*be owing to its exemption from the damp vapours so often experiences in the valley towns.*

With respect to moisture, the same learned gentleman remarks:

*But for an occasional sea-fog, after the heat of a summer's day, Exmouth is free from mists and damp vapours; and, in common with Budleigh Salterton, is less liable to rain than other places in the neighbourhood. Rain clouds from the Atlantic are frequently seen coming, as it were straight towards it, but influenced by the high lands to the northward, from Berry Head to Haldon, sweep by, discharging themselves to the interior of the country.*

Again he says:

*Exmouth will be found particularly serviceable as a resort for weakly children and those of a scrofulous constitution, and where change is required in the debility consequent upon attacks of fever, or during convalescence after other disease.*

*The Death Rate of a town is the best indicator of its healthiness or unhealthiness, and whoever takes the trouble to examine the Returns of the Registrar of England, on the 'Mortality in the Principle Watering Places During the Spring Quarter of 1873' will therein discover that Exmouth shares with two other places (Hove and Bognor) the enviable eminence of having a smaller death-rate than any other of the (to quote the Registrar General's words) '47 seaside of inland watering places to which a considerable portion of our town residents resort at this time of the year for healthy relaxation.*



Image 4(a) SC1140, Imperial Hotel Exmouth Devon, Rock & Co, 1871



Image 4(b) SC1103, The Strand Exmouth Devon, Rock & Co, 1871



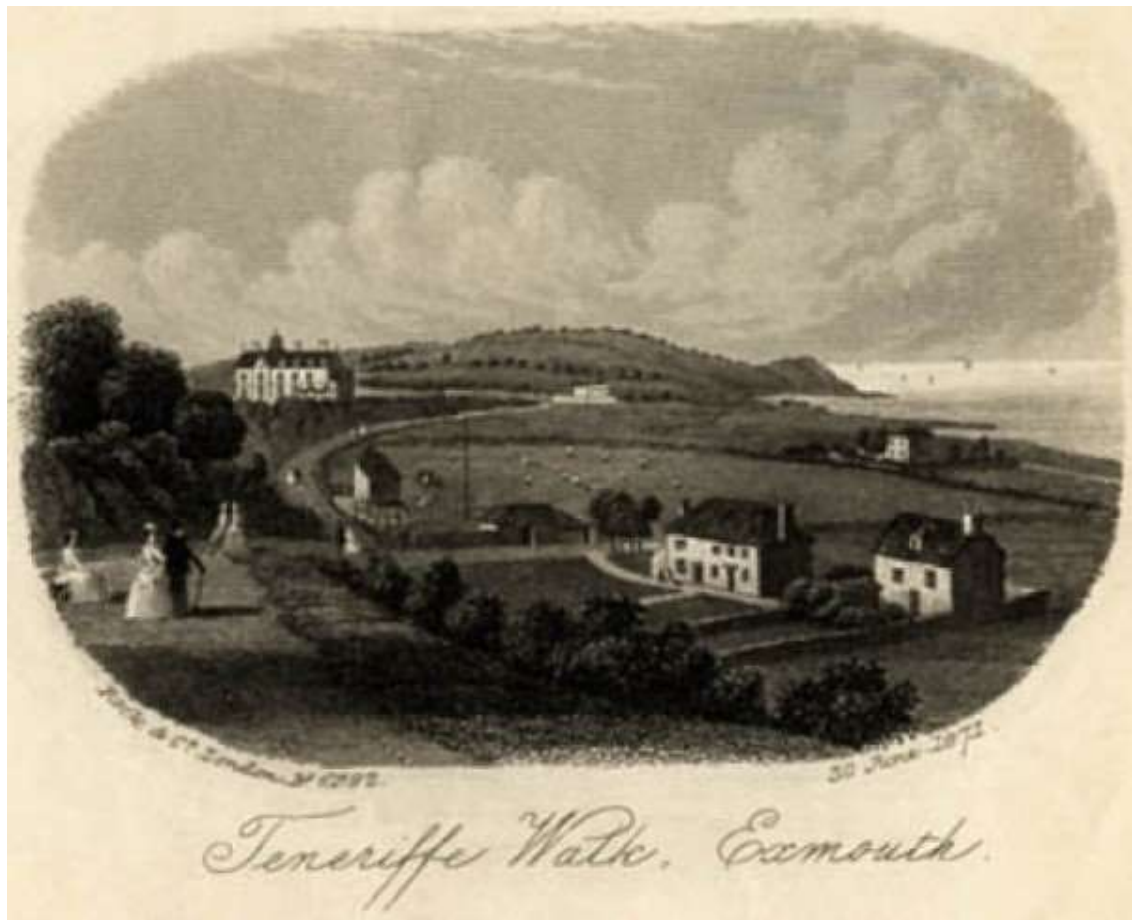


Image 4(c) SC1107, Teneriffe Walk Exmouth, Rock & Co, 1871



Image 4(d) SC1089, View from Beacon Hill Exmouth, Rock & Co, 1871



Image 4(e) SC1081B, Exmouth from the Sea Wall, Newman & Co, 1850

## Sources

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