

## History and Development of Teignmouth Docks

Historians tend to look to maps of a given County to establish if a particular place was of significant importance. Early maps of Devon dated 1534 and 1575<sup>[1]</sup> do not actually show Teignmouth, implying perhaps that a small town on the Southwest coast of England was in fact unimportant. However, Teignmouth Docks have been in existence at least since the thirteenth Century, although they would have mainly been used for local activity. In 1326, the threat of invasion called for all ships over 50 tons to be called for service. Teignmouth supplied eight such ships and one hundred and sixty three men.<sup>[2]</sup> This was the second highest in the County.

In 1272, when Edward I came to the throne, Teignmouth was a little fishing town and was just beginning to make a name for itself as a port. The prosperity of Teignmouth Port pleased the Bishops who received tithes from it, and by the early Fourteenth Century Teignmouth was a thriving Port, trading mainly in fish and salt. However, by the end of the Fourteenth Century and the beginning of the Fifteenth Century the demands on Devon's Ports had diminished because Henry V was trying to build a Royal Navy so as to reduce the Nation's dependence on Merchant Shipping.

Teignmouth had in previous times been divided into two manors, East and West. The Lords of the Manors had suffered greatly during the Civil War in England, for both had been royalists. Later in 1690, Teignmouth saw the last invasion of Britain when French troops landed on English soil. No doubt enraged by the news that James II had been defeated at the Battle of Boyne in Ireland the French troops landed and destroyed most of West Teignmouth by fire. The local churches were ransacked and the parish records destroyed, yet despite all this no lives were lost. The damage caused by the fire cost about £11,000. The only building that survived the fire was the public house, The Jolly Sailor situated near to the docks. All the original buildings at the docks were destroyed by the fire and were rebuilt and some still remain today.<sup>[3]</sup>

The Eighteenth Century was generally successful for Teignmouth Port. West Teignmouth was growing fast. Clay had started to be exported from the Teign Valley in 1700 and by 1740, 500 tons of clay was being exported and by 1785 this had increased to 9,995 tons. Previously it had been exported on horseback from the Bovey Basin to Exeter or Topsham, now it travelled by horse drawn barge. Wool was also exported from West Teignmouth. Transport for most goods by sea was easier and cheaper than by road, despite experiencing interference from weather conditions and tolls. Many favoured Teignmouth Port, as it was a port with cheaper tolls than Exeter.

Although Teignmouth Port had started to be a thriving enterprise, it was still classified as a creek and therefore under the jurisdiction of Exeter until 1853. In 1836 an Act of Parliament was passed for improving the harbour of Teignmouth. This gave Teignmouth Port some independence, which the locals had been wanting for some years. The issue of independence was based on two related issues. Firstly the collection of custom duties and imposition of town tolls and secondly but more importantly, Teignmouth businessmen complained about having to travel to Exeter to deal with custom formalities and complained that Exeter was receiving Monies from the docks at Teignmouth and yet not sharing responsibility for the maintenance or improvement of the harbour. The new independent port of Teignmouth had revised governing rules that stated that harbour commissioners were to be nominated by the two Lords of the manors and other interested parties. The new harbour commissioners also took over the debt of £5,600 and had to raise a loan of another £15,000.

Early Nineteenth Century maps of Devon show Teignmouth in large and bold letters and nearby Torquay marked as Torre in small letters. In 1850 the railway line was extended to both Teignmouth and Torquay. This proved to be an economic success for Torquay and of course has helped make it the Town that it is today however, Teignmouth was not greatly improved by the coming of the railway and if anything the business of the docks suffered slightly. What pleased the locals was that all ships that sailed from Dawlish to Torquay bore the registration letters of TH, the first and last letters of Teignmouth. This remains so today.

Teignmouth Port, by now handled a variety of goods. Imports were mainly of wood pulp, but 40,000 tons of coal was brought in annually. Railway sidings had been constructed at the old Quay in 1851 when the first imports of coal began. Quay Road, which still exists today, was also established for easier access to the Quays.<sup>[4]</sup> Clay was also an important export of Teignmouth Port and one company had exported more than 30,000 tons annually. Manganese, lead, iron and granite were also exported, although the port prospered from Clay. In 1886, Teignmouth Quay Company was formed and had a variety of directors, among them Seale Hayne.

The Depression of the 1930s and the results of the First World War had seriously affected the Port, and the Quays were almost derelict and in a bad state of repair. In 1932 Teignmouth Quay Company changed the management and made the decision to pull the Port back into a well-organized, safe and economic success. The new management saw the possibility of expanding the port into the busiest harbour in the South West of England. Part of one of the Quays had sunk below the surface of the

River Teign. The machinery was dated and the buildings also dated back to the late 1690s. The one good point that made the port worthwhile was that it still handled 23,000 tons of cargo a year. A redevelopment programme costing thousands of pounds over the next 33 years began to fall into place. In 1939 the Port was handling 86,979 tons a year compared to that at the start of the redevelopment programme in 1932.

In 1939 Britain was once again at war. Trade was very poor and the docks were used as a storage depot and things did not improve until after the war. In 1958 reports show that from January until the end of November that year 111,283 tons were loaded at Teignmouth Port [5]. Ball Clay was now the leading export, being shipped to Scandinavia, France and Italy. Before the War, 40,000 tons of this clay was being exported and by the end of 1959 this had increased to between 127,000 to 150,000 tons. Teignmouth Port did not only export cargo but had imports too. These included some 4,000 tons of timber, 2,500 tons of fertilizer, 2,000 tons of grain and nearly 1,000 tons of rock salt. In 1962 the port handled 8,365 tons of scrap metal bound for Germany, Holland and Spain [6]. During 1980, 502,000 tons of cargo was transported through Teignmouth, 319,417 tons was exported and 182,828 tons was imported. Some 600 vessels used the port, carrying such cargo as clay, grain, timber, steel, logs, cement and fertilizer. In 1968, United Builders' Merchants bought the company. Eleven years later, the company yet again changed hands and was bought by Jeff Boyne and Keith Dunn. The following year in 1988 it was sold to Associated British Ports, and Jeff Boyne remained the Managing Director. In 1987, Clay was still their major export.

The closure of Exmouth Docks in December 1989, led to Teignmouth being the only port between Plymouth and Southampton. Subsequently there was a huge increase in the amount of cargo handled, and in 1990 imported and exported cargo totalled 889,000 tons. The increased workload for Teignmouth Docks led to more labourers being required, which was good because as generally rule work in Teignmouth was seasonal.

Ball clay was, and still is to be found in the Bovey Basin and the early exploiters of this natural resource would have sold it to local pipe makers. The first record of it being shipped out of Devon was in 1700, when John Osland transported '20 tons of tobacco pipe clay' from Teignmouth to London [7]. The first Clay merchant was a Dorset man who leased clay land in the Bovey Basin and exported 490 tons from Teignmouth to London during 1726-1729. From 1730, shipments of clay were small, but regular until 1742 when there was a steady increase. The vast majority was shipped to London however; in 1729 the first shipment was dispatched to Staffordshire via the Port of Liverpool for potters, including Josiah

Wedgewood. During the eighteenth Century it became popular for individual merchants to cease trading independently and to form partnerships. These partnerships have since become the ball clay companies of the district. In 1809, Whiteway, Watts and Co was formed, followed by a second company called Blake, Davy and Co in 1853. In 1860, there were three companies sharing the ball clay industry between them, firstly Whiteway, Watts and Co, secondly, Devon and Courtenay Clay Company and thirdly, Watts, Blake, Bearne and Co. Later in the nineteenth Century, Watts, Blake, Bearne & Co absorbed the two other companies mentioned above as well as two smaller companies later formed, and remained known as Watts, Blake, Bearne & Co (WWB). The clay industry had suffered during the First World War and the subsequent economic depression and was beginning to recover when the Second World War broke out. The effects of the Second World War were more dramatic than the First World War. The administration of the Port of Teignmouth, which had been exporting the ball clay, fell under the control of the Admiralty, which rather rapidly meant that exports of clay ceased during the war. Exports of other goods including some clay continued by railway to other ports. Both the Company of Watts, Blake and Bearne and the clay industry suffered greatly and lost half its labour force during the war, and by the end of the war the exported amount of clay had been reduced to a mere 4,000 tons. After the war, following an enquiry from the Board of Trade, the ball clay industry had been transformed. Over the years ball clay had been exported from Teignmouth Docks to a variety of destinations across the world, and still continues to do so.

## **Bibliography**

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