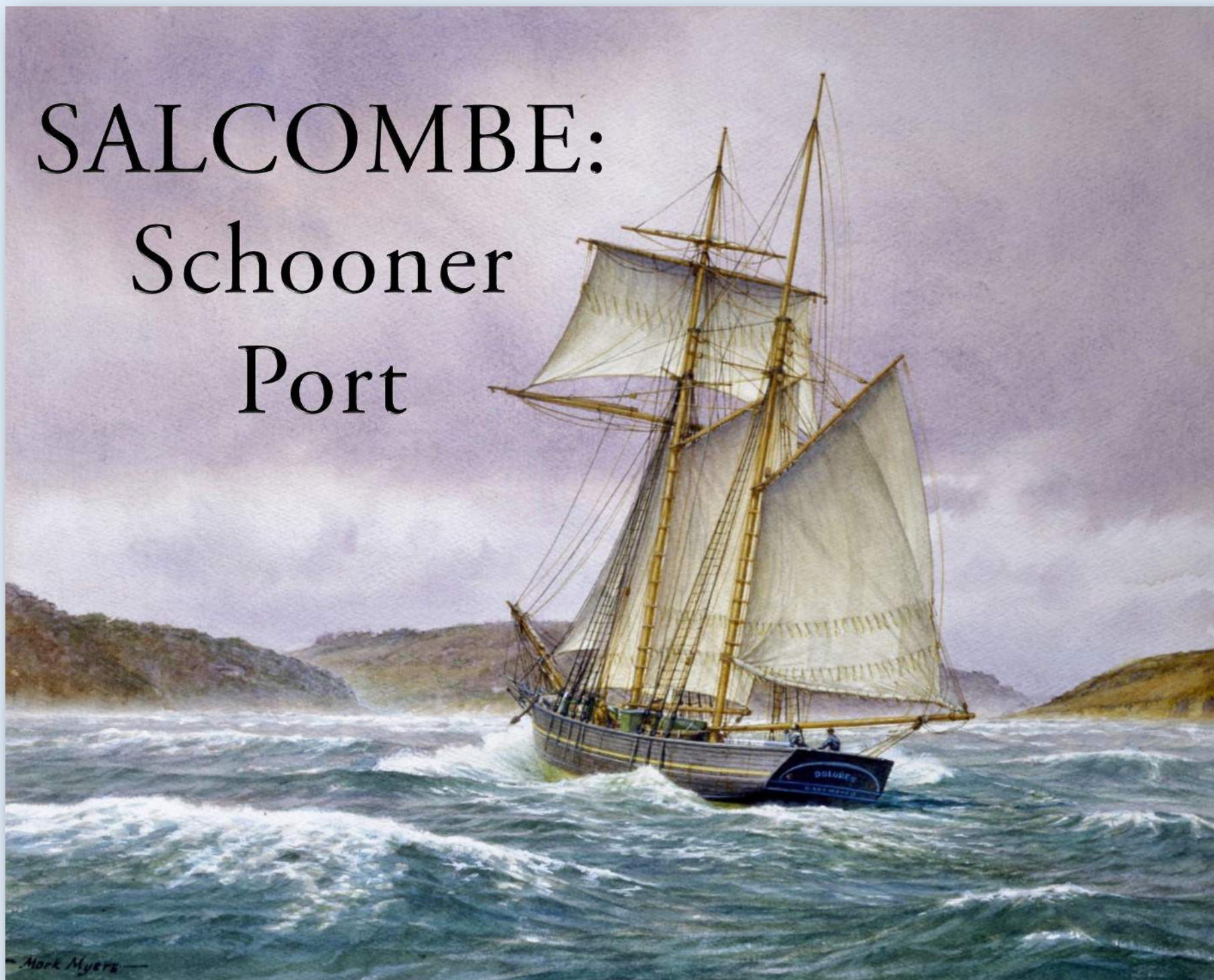


SALCOMBE: Schooner Port



The Schooner Dolores off Salcombe Bar. Painting by Mark R. Myers PPRSMA

In the early 1800s, Salcombe was little more than an obscure fishing port with an unsavoury reputation for smuggling. By 1835, however, the town had become famous for its beautiful clipper schooners, the 'Salcombe fruiters'.

Built for speed in the five shipyards at Salcombe and at Date's Shipwright's Yard in Kingsbridge, these small, fine-lined vessels raced home with cargoes of highly perishable fruit from the Azores, the Mediterranean and the Bahamas to the fruit markets of London, Bristol, Liverpool and Hull.

With mainly local owners, masters and crews, the Salcombe fruiters played a leading part in the fruit trade for nearly forty years. Other ports were involved, but it was the Salcombe schooners that were the most acclaimed.

*'Salcombe a small harbour, equipped with few facilities, yet for some reason, from the early 19th century a major port in the trades of small ships and from the very first days of the merchant schooners their port, perhaps more so than any other...becoming by the middle 19th century the **fruitship port in chief.**'*

Dr. Basil Greenhill

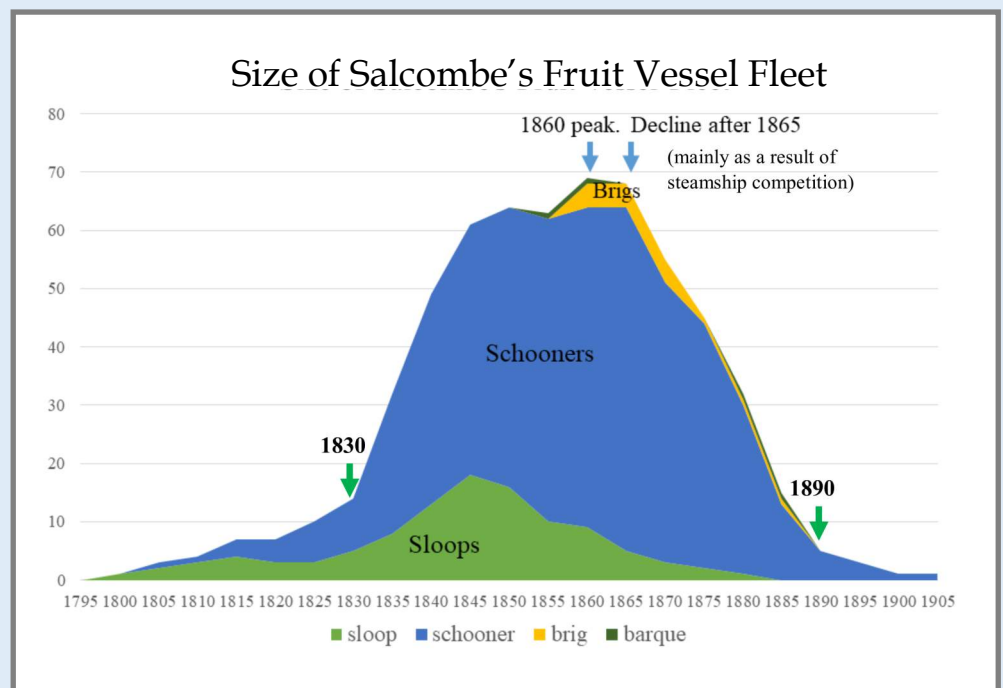
The Fruit Schooners: I



The Fruit Schooners. Painting by Montague Dawson



Phoenix, 103 tons, built in 1835 by William Bonker, entering Naples



'Salcombe is fast rising into notoriety. The schooners built here, of which during the past six years there have been many, bear excellent characters for sailing and stowage.'

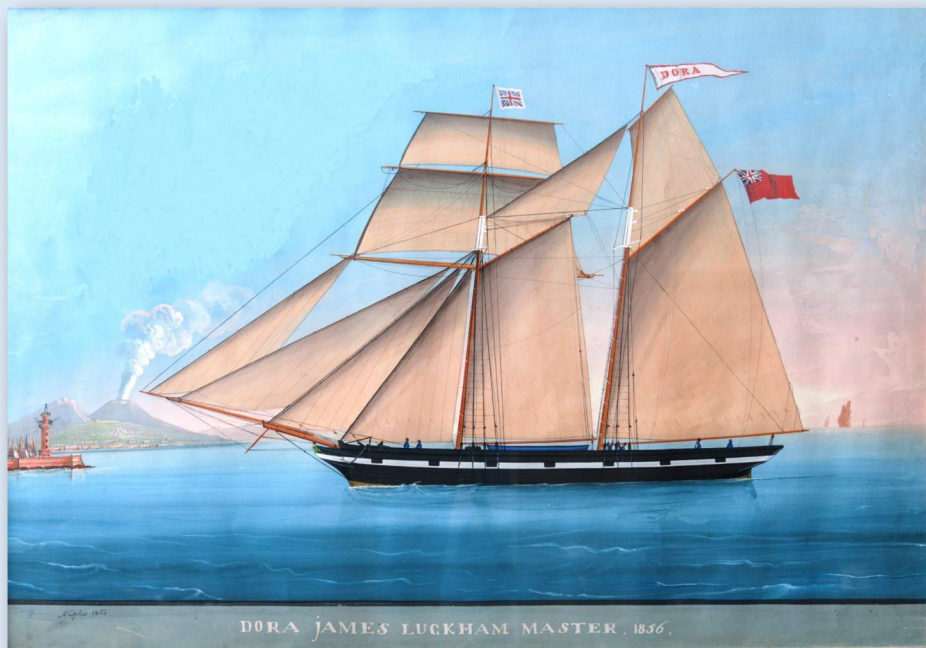
Exeter Flying Post 1834

'Salcombe has, within the last ten years, risen to a degree of celebrity almost unexampled, especially for shipbuilding.'

Western Morning News 1835

Salcombe vessels were highly sought after by the merchants that chartered the fruit schooners – not only because of their sailing qualities but because they were commanded by men who had a reputation for speed and for delivering fruit in good condition.

The Fruit Schooners: 2



Dora of Salcombe, 81 tons, built in 1841 by James Vivian, entering Naples



Pass By, 148 tons, built in 1862 by William Date entering Smyrna

'The fruit schooners were little vessels, constructed on superb lines, and were clippers of the true pattern, built to go to windward like steam, to use weather that obliged vessels five or six times bigger to lie to, and to make the voyage out and home with a dispatch often phenomenal.'

William Clark Russell, 1885

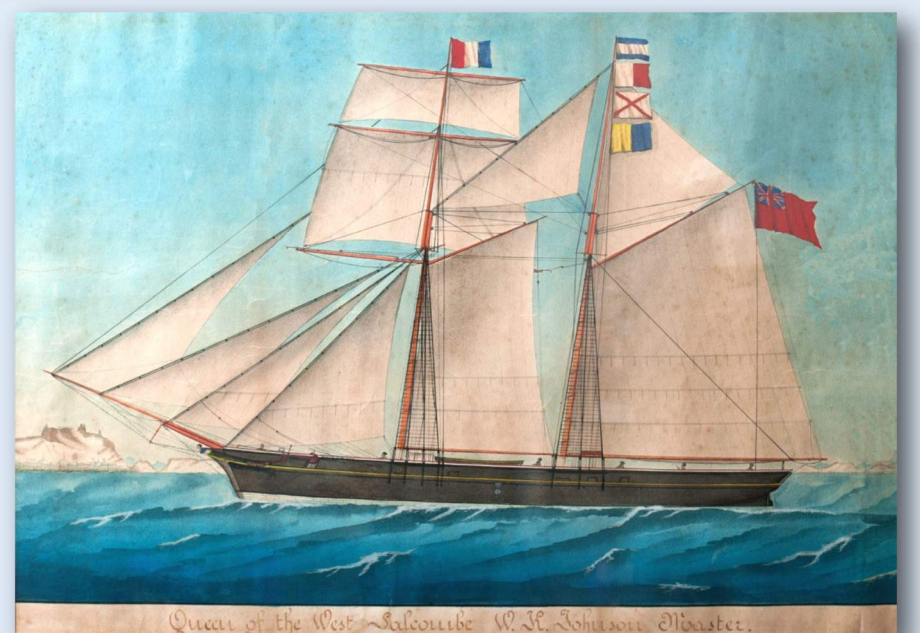
Engaged in a clean trade and with a smart crew, the fruit schooner had all the appearance of a sleek racing yacht.

'With their tall masts, their shapely yards, well-kept hulls and smart canvases, they were beautiful to behold.'

Captain Samuel Wills Ryder

To compare them with the tea-clippers is by no means fanciful, and if they received half the attention lavished on those vessels they would still be underrated.'

Hervey Bentham



Queen of the West, 119 ton schooner, built by James Vivian in 1849



Peri, 58 tons, built in 1834 by John Ball, entering the Mersey in 1836



Phoenix, 103 tons, built in 1835 by William Bonker, entering Naples

The Captains: 'a very fine class of men'



William Port



William Date



John Adams

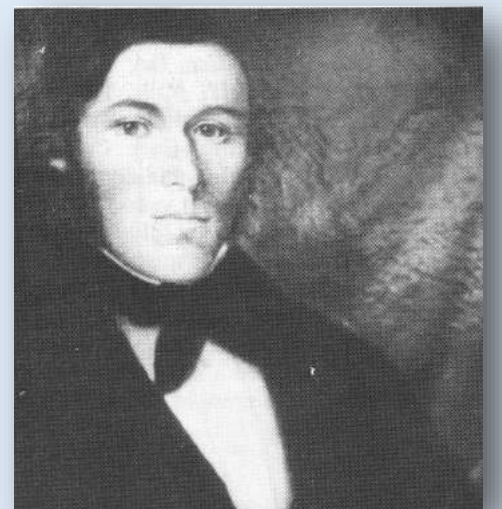


Edward Quick

'The captains of these boats, which were built in Salcombe in Devon, were a very fine class of men, salts of the old school, displaying character and originality and possessing a fine reputation for straightforward, honourable conduct.

Like their ships, most of the masters came from Salcombe'

from a history of the firm of Joseph Travers & Sons, importers of dried fruit



F.W. Hill



F.J. Harding & his wife
Bertha who sailed with him



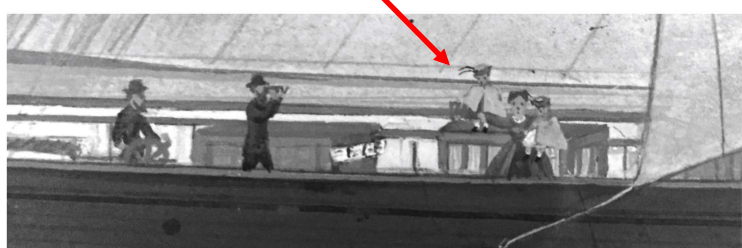
Thomas May

'The masters of [Salcombe] vessels have long borne the palm for sobriety, perseverance and nautical skill, and among merchants, the sailors and ships of Salcombe have obtained the preference'

Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 1850

For centuries the South Hams of Devon had been a breeding ground for mariners and a prodigious number went on to become master mariners. In the nineteenth century 340 are known to have been born in Salcombe (Malborough parish) and 260 in nearby parishes – no less than 600 master mariners in all. Many bore familiar local names such as:

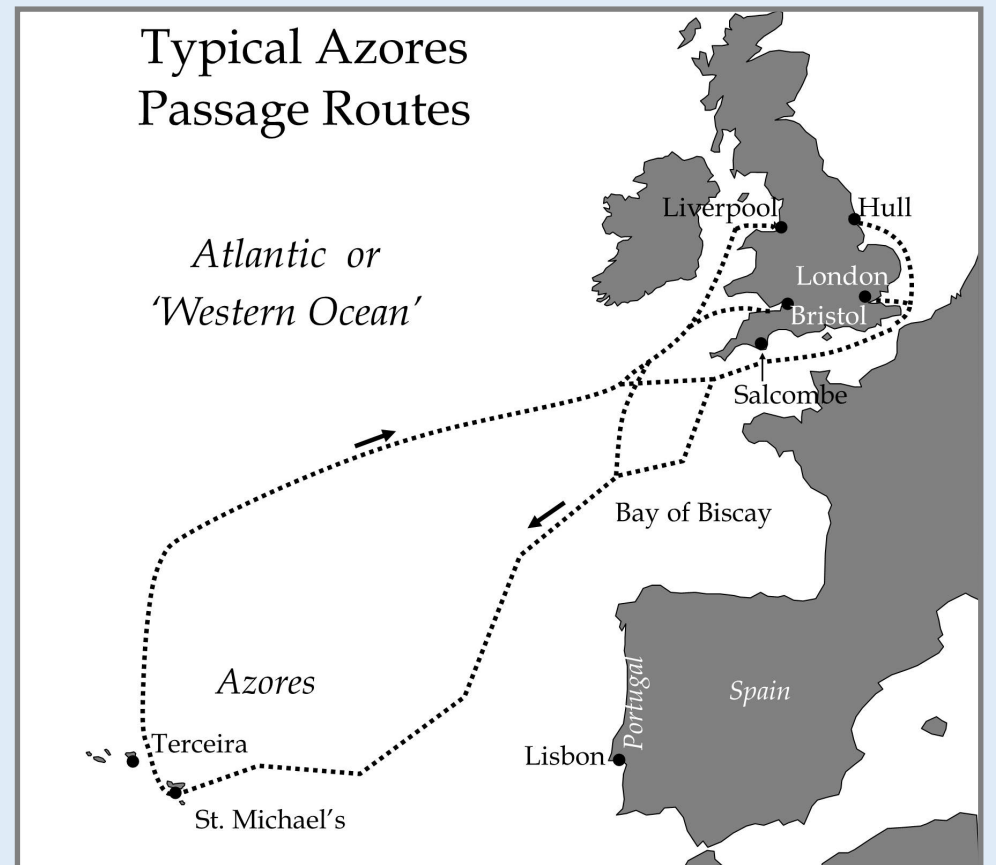
Adams, Ball, Cleverly, Cove, Cranch, Dornom, Evans, Foale, Forbes, Frink, Gillard, Jellard, Hannaford, Harnden, Jarvis, King, Lamble, Lapthorn, Luckham, May, Osborne, Partridge, Patey, Penzwill, Pepperell, Prowse, Putt, Quick, Rundle, Ryder, Sheriff, Sladen, Southwood, Steer, Tolcher, Trinick, Vincent, Vivian, Weymouth, Wills, Wood, Yabsley, Yeoman



The brig *Golden Fleece*, Marcus Harnden, master, with his wife Sarah and children



The Azores Orange Trade



The orange season lasted from early November until April and fast, 'weatherly' vessels were required which could thrash their way down, against the prevailing winds, to the Azores in the worst of the winter weather. Wet through day and night with scarcely any restful sleep it was a tough life for the men who sailed them.

With a perishable cargo under the hatches, speed had to be maintained on the return voyage whatever the conditions and, in this role, topsail schooners with fine-lined, deep-heeled hulls and carrying a huge press of sail, were ideally suited.



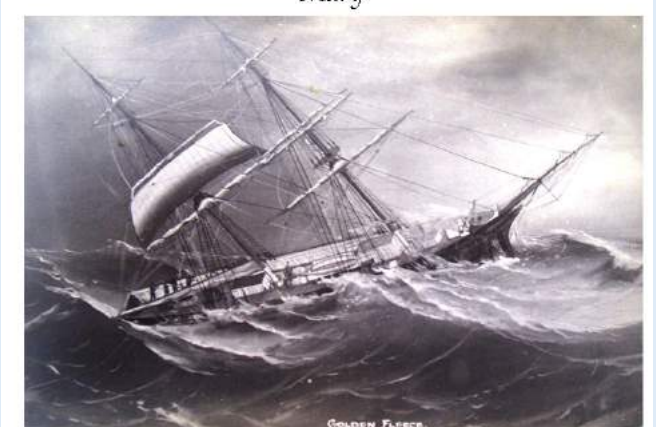
Briton's Pride



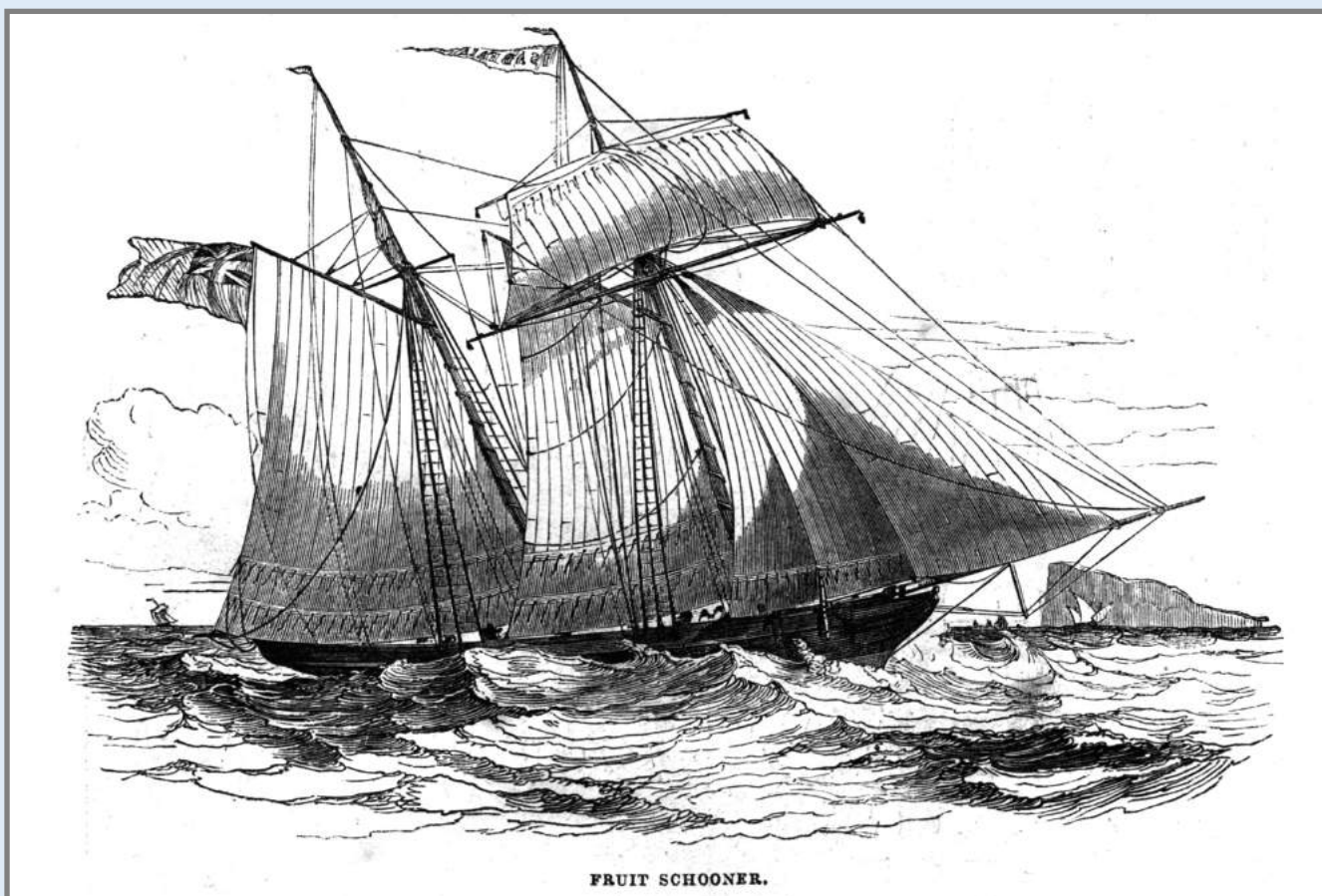
Renown



Mary



Golden Fleece



The Mediterranean Dried Fruit Trades

Between the 1830s and 1860s, Salcombe fruit schooners played a prominent role in the Mediterranean dried fruit trades. The schooners, sailed to Malaga and Valencia for raisins, to the Ionian Islands and to Patras on the Greek mainland for currants and to Smyrna on the Turkish coast for figs and raisins.

'Seamanship had to be of the best, for there existed very strong competition among the firms in the trade to be the first to get the new fruit home.' Joseph Travers



Isabella of Salcombe, 102 tons, built in 1852 by John Evans entering Smyrna



The Pineapple Trade

Salcombe ships also played a leading role in the pineapple trade, shipping pineapples from Nassau and Eleuthera in the Bahamas to the London market.

Three-masted schooners and barquentines, such as the *Brizo* opposite, were employed and fitted with special galleries to transport the fruit.



BRIZO, barquentine built by Vivian 1877 for the pineapple trade

Paintings in the Salcombe Maritime Museum Collection

1: Salcombe Schooners



Peri, 58 tons, built in 1834 by John Ball, entering the Mersey in 1836



Phoenix, 103 tons, built in 1835 by William Bonker, entering Naples



Dolores, 96 tons, built in 1841 by William Bonker, entering Naples



Dora of Salcombe, 81 tons, built in 1841 by James Vivian, entering Naples



Queen of the West, 119 tons, built in 1849 by James Vivian



Queen of the West, 119 tons, built in 1849 by James Vivian



Isabella of Salcombe, 102 tons, built in 1852 by John Evans entering Smyrna



Clara, 171 tons, built in 1858 by Elizabeth Evans, entering Naples



Kate, 75 tons, built in 1861 by William Bonker entering Naples



Pass By, 148 tons, built in 1862 by William Date entering Smyrna



Spring, 138 tons, built in 1867 by William Date, leaving Genoa



Zenobia, 99 tons, built in 1868 by Harnden & Whiddon



Zenobia in a gale, October 1858'



Doris, 94 tons, built in 1880 by Henry Harnden, entering Naples



Lord Devon, 114 tons, built in 1885 by T. Saunders entering Naples

Paintings in the Salcombe Maritime Museum Collection

2: Salcombe Brigs and Barques



Prothesa, brig, 165 tons, built in 1855 by R. Johnson of Bideford



Eugenie, brigantine, 136 tons, built in 1856 by John Evans



Erme, 3-masted schooner, 206 tons, built 1863 by William Bonker



Restless, brigantine, 189 tons, built in 1865 by William Date



Alvington, barque, 313 tons, built in 1865 by W. Watson of Sunderland



Argyra, brig, 228 tons, built in 1866 by Elizabeth Evans



Phantom, brig, 249 tons, built in 1867 by Elizabeth Evans, leaving the Mersey



Leader, brigantine, 196 tons, built 1869 by Elizabeth Evans



Morning Star, barquentine, 280 tons, built in 1871 by William Date



Golden Fleece, brig, 176 tons, built in 1873 by Henry Harnden

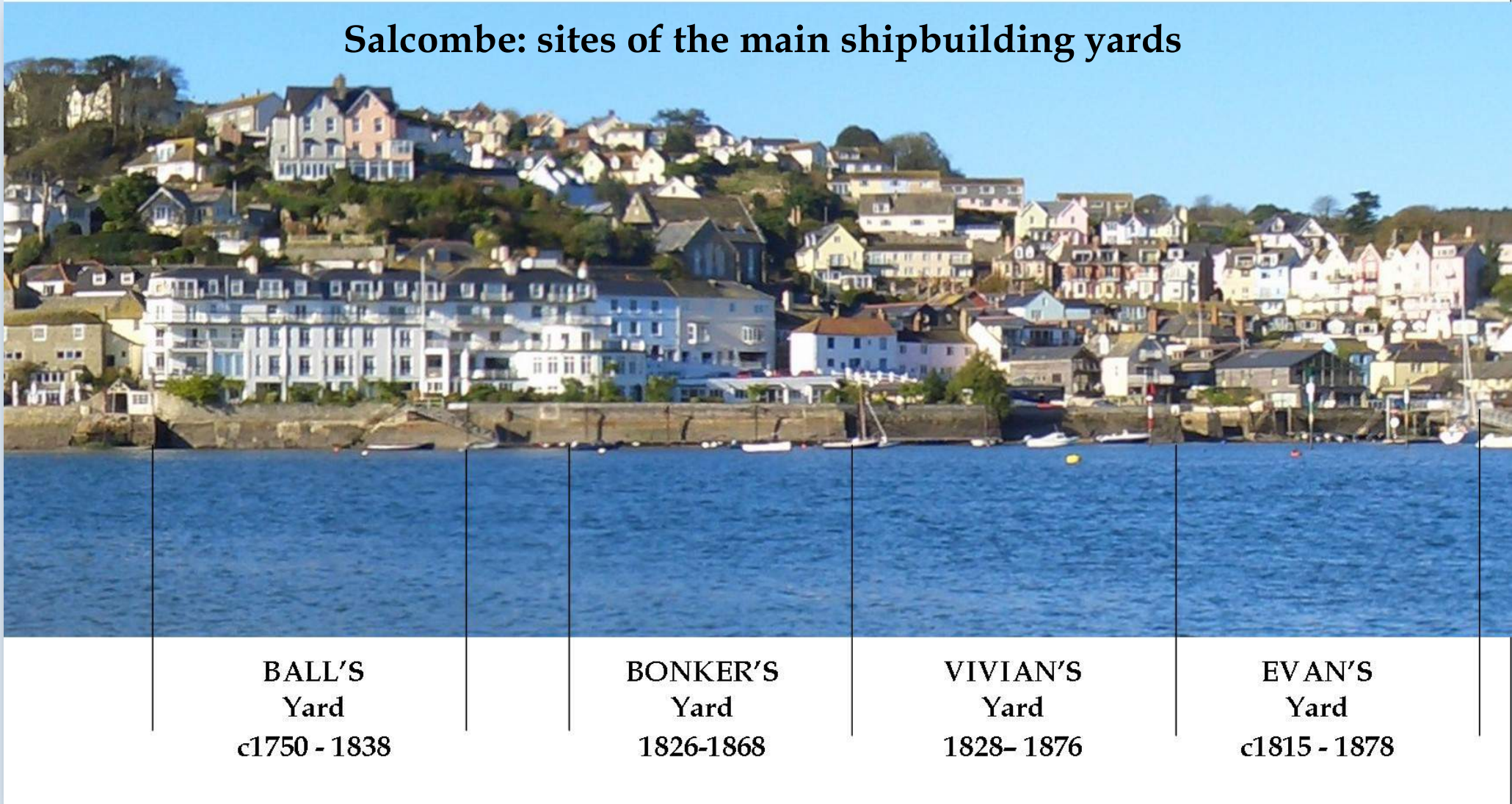


Ethel, brigantine, 195 tons, built in 1876 by William Date



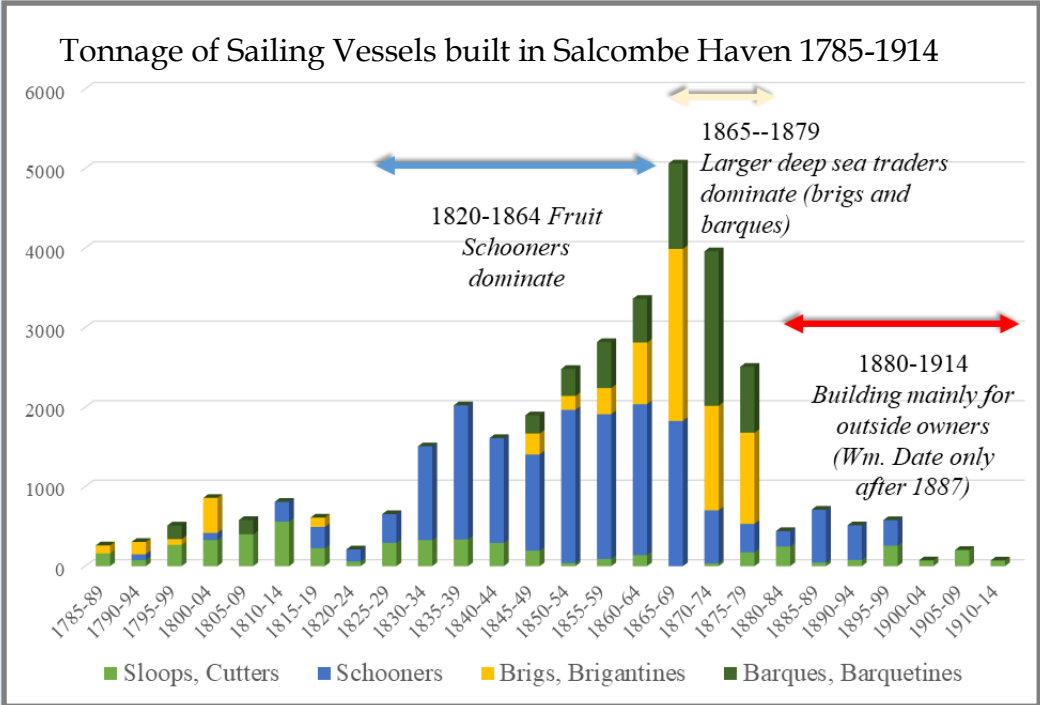
Creole, brig, 275 tons, completed in 1878 by William Evans

The Shipbuilders

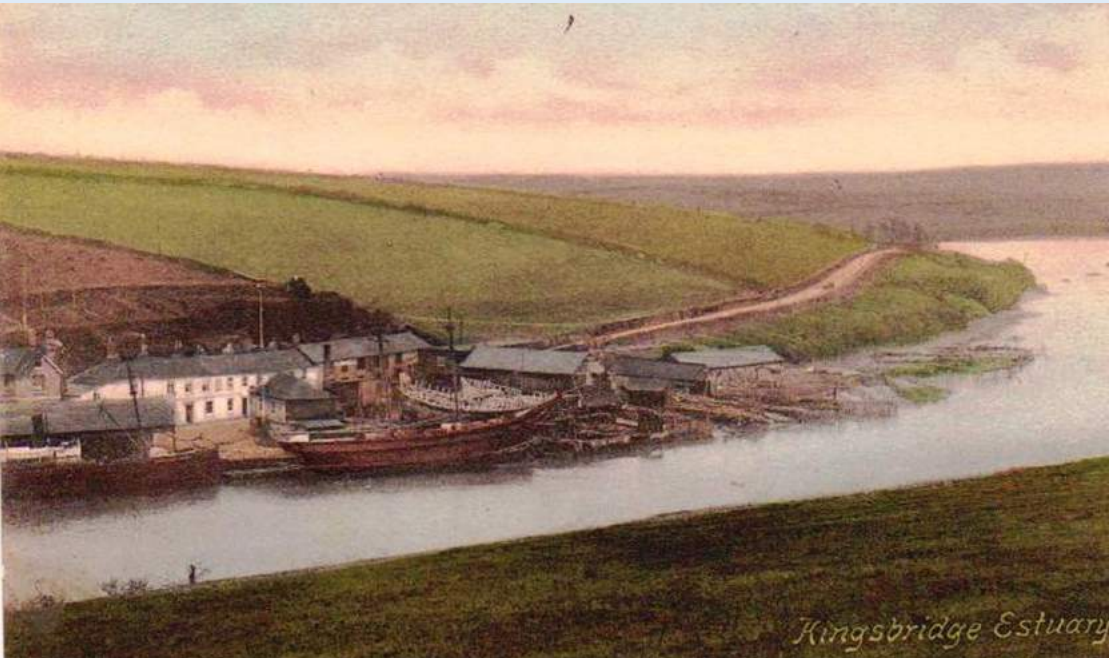


The design of the schooners was brought to perfection in the little yards of Ball, Bonker, Vivian, Evans and Harnden in Salcombe and in that of William Date in Kingsbridge.

Between 1785 and 1912 at least 320 merchant sailing vessels were built in these yards. Schooners accounted for just under half the output.



Site of Harnden's Island Quay Yard

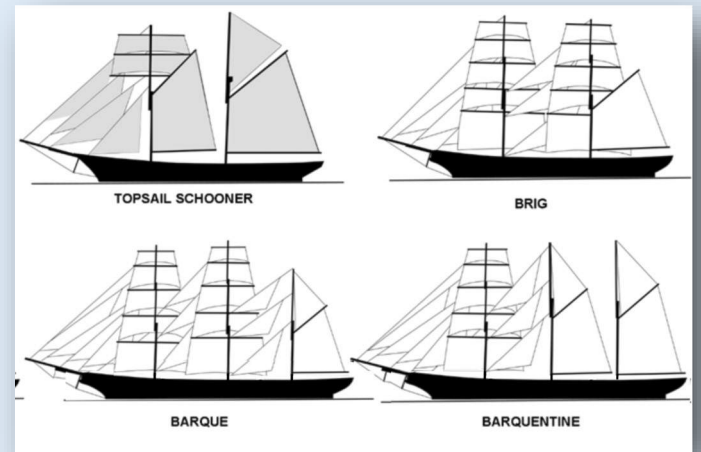


William Date's 'Shipwright's Yard' at Kingsbridge

The Deep Sea Traders

Salcombe's heyday as a fruitship port largely came to an end after the mid-1860s as a result of steamship competition but, far from stagnating, the town went on to enjoy another ten years of prosperity as local shipowners diversified into alternative deep sea trades.

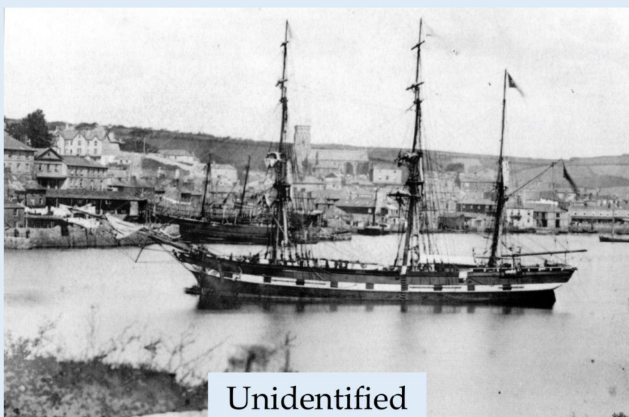
Many of the Haven's schooners were transferred into the Newfoundland saltfish trade and new, larger vessels, such as brigs and barques, were acquired for employment in those trans-oceanic trades where sailing vessels could still compete with steam. The deep sea traders carried out coal from Cardiff and brought back cargoes such as sugar from the West Indies, Brazil and Mauritius and tea from China.



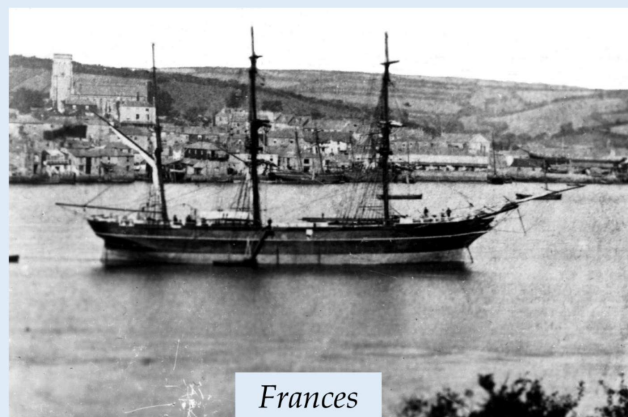
Phantom, brig, 249 tons, built in 1867 by Elizabeth Evans, leaving the Mersey



Erme, 3-masted schooner, 206 tons, built 1863 by William Bonker



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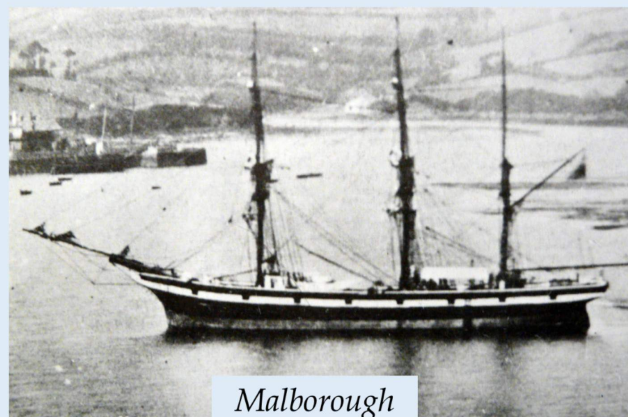


Frances

Deep-Sea Trading Barques in Salcombe Harbour



Brizo



Malborough



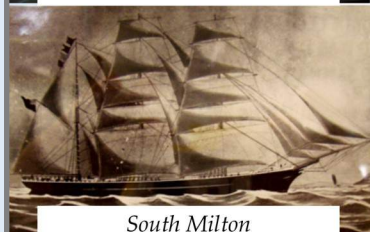
Salcombe Castle



Zodiac



Churchstow



South Milton



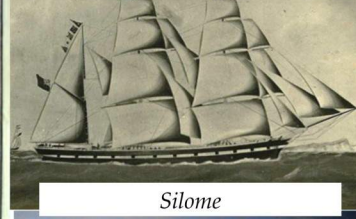
Salcombe Ships 'Down Under'

Between 1837 and 1893 at least 18 Salcombe built or owned ships traded with Australia and New Zealand.

Some ended their careers there.



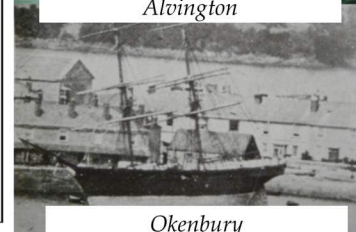
Lady Agnes



Silome



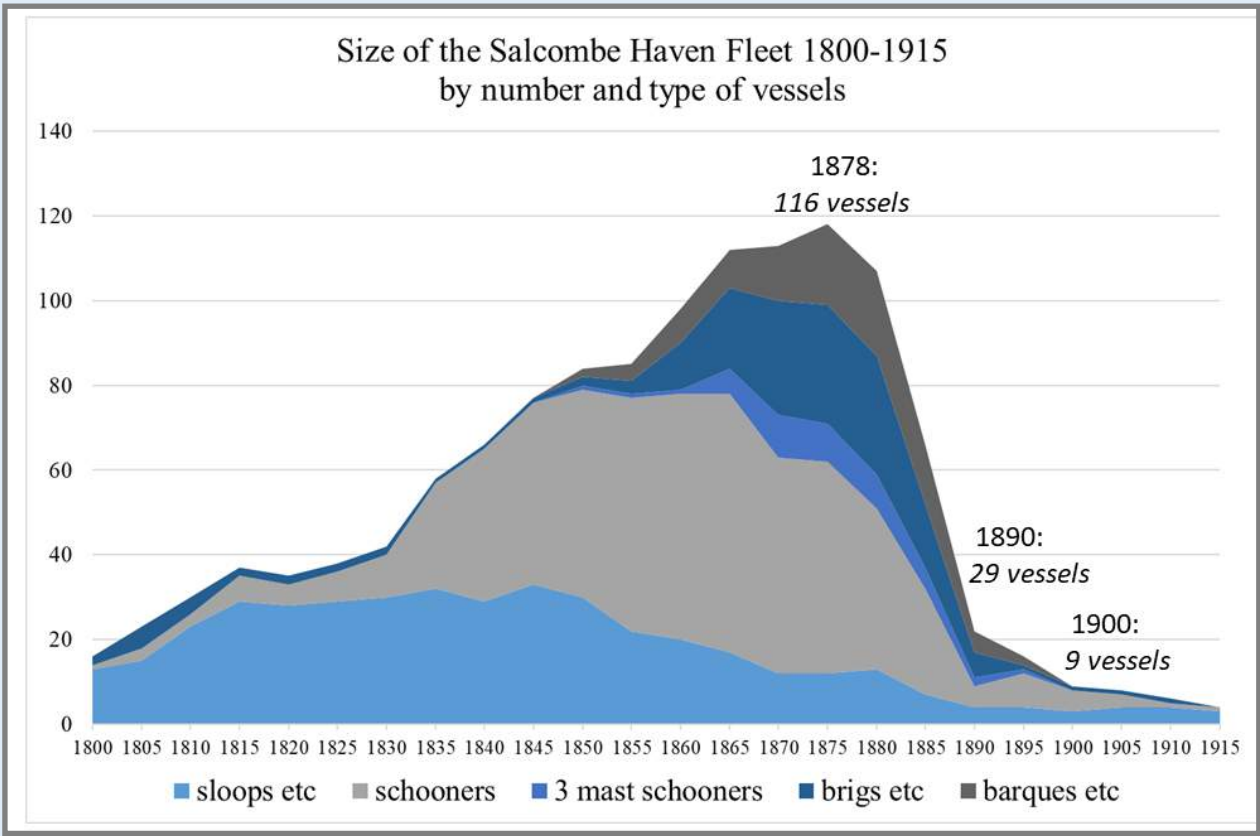
Alvington



Okenbury

Transformation: From Shipping to Yachting & Tourism

By the end of the 1870s competition from iron and steam, combined with a range of economic factors, led to the virtual collapse of shipowning and shipbuilding in the Haven. Salcombe suffered greatly in the 1880s and many of those engaged in maritime trades moved to larger ports such as Plymouth, Cardiff, Liverpool, London and Hull to find work.



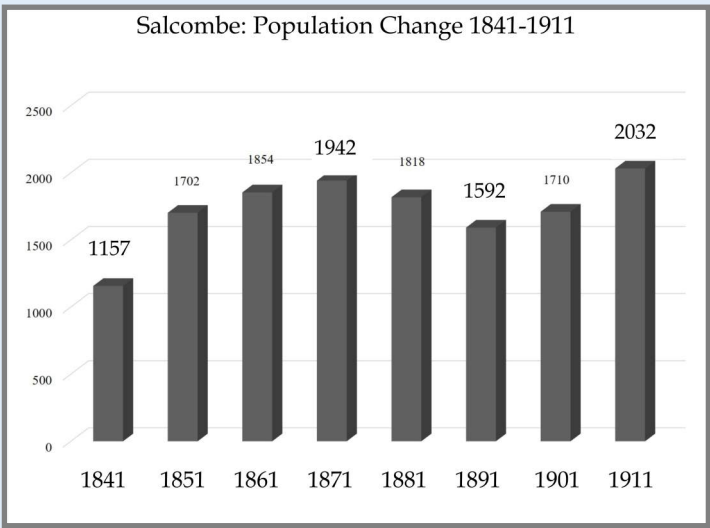
‘Shipping is in a wretched state, only a few vessels are paying, and many are bringing their owners in debt.’

Salcombe Times 1877

‘The yards are nearly all silent, and most of the men have had to seek employment elsewhere. The trade is going from bad to worse, without the faintest prospect of revival.’

The Western Times 1878

After 1893 the town’s economic fortunes began to revive with the arrival of the railway in Kingsbridge. The railway brought increasing numbers of tourists to the area and, in the years leading up to the First World War, the unspoilt beauty of the harbour attracted a growing number of yachtsmen.



Yachting and tourism in Salcombe post-1890

Above: York Hotel Below: Marine Hotel



*‘Now the ships have all departed,
Once the people’s joy and pride,
Where the schooners rode at anchor,
Yachts alone swing on the tide’*

from Songs of Salcombe and the West
Country by R.L. Partridge. 1930

ON SALE HERE!

SALCOMBE

Schooner Port

Roger Barrett



Salcombe Maritime Museum

Written by Salcombe Maritime Museum curator, Roger Barrett, this new book is the first comprehensive account of Salcombe's heyday as a shipbuilding and shipowning port. Over 220 pages, it tells the story of the port's maritime community in the nineteenth century and describes the ships, their trades and the men who built, owned and sailed them.

The book contains over 250 illustrations, including 32 full colour reproductions of the paintings of locally-built sailing ships in the museum's collection. Price £19.99

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