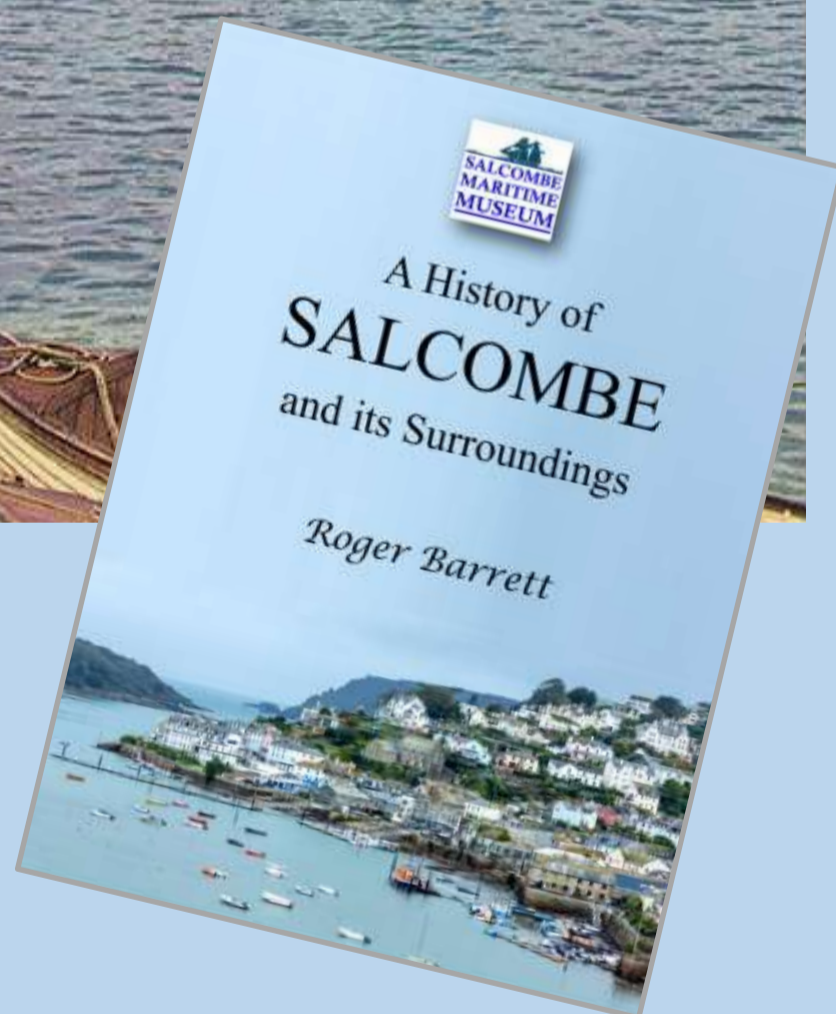
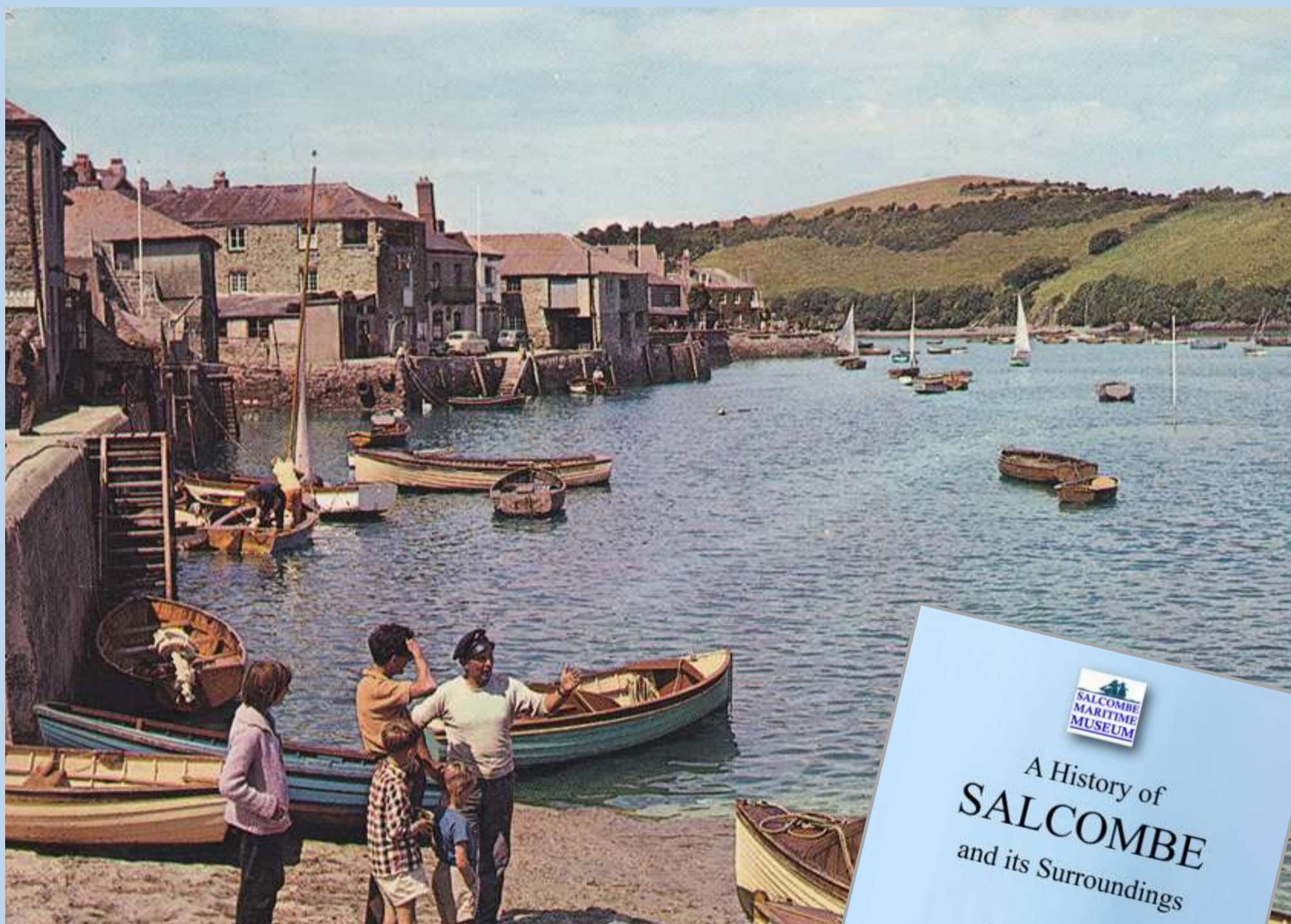


Salcombe Through the Ages



A display illustrating
some of the key events
described in '*A History of
Salcombe and its Surroundings*'
published by the museum.

On sale now. Price £12.95

1. Early History

The Bronze Age

The first known reference to Salcombe is dated 1244, but the sheltered waters of the adjoining tidal creeks would have been used by fishermen and traders from the earliest times. Along the coast evidence of settled farming communities during the Bronze Age 3,000 years ago, is provided by the ancient field systems at Deckler's Cliff near Gara Rock and, just off the coast at nearby Moor Sands, finds from the protected Bronze Age wreck sites suggest strong trading links with continental Europe.



Bronze Age clay pots, of Minoan/Cypriot origin, found at Rickham and on display in the Wreck Room



*Artefacts found on the Moor Sands
Bronze Age Wreck Site
1300-800BC – one of the oldest
known shipwrecks in Europe.*

The Romans

The Romans, during their occupation of Britain between AD 43-410, had only a limited impact on the South West beyond Exeter. Their trading vessels, however, must have sailed regularly along the coasts of South Devon and Cornwall and the discovery of a Roman lamp of the Vespasian Period (AD 69-79) in Salcombe in 1976 suggests that they entered the Kingsbridge Estuary at a fairly early date.



Found in Salcombe: A Roman lamp bearing the horse motif of the Emperor Vespasian on display in the Wreck Room

2. Invaders and Pirates

The Breton Raid 1403

Although a rather obscure fishing settlement between the 13th and 15th centuries, Salcombe was important enough to attract the unwelcome attention of a Breton and Norman raiding force in 1403 and, with other harbours in the Estuary, to supply ships to fight the King's enemies in France and Scotland.



Breton Raiders in 1403

The Spanish Armada 1588

On 31 July 1588 local people, gathered on the three great headlands near the mouth of the estuary – Bolt Head, Prawle Point and Start Point, witnessed a spectacle of 'unsurpassed magnitude as the greatest navy that ever swam the sea' sailed by in slow procession, closely pursued by the English fleet commanded by Lord Howard.

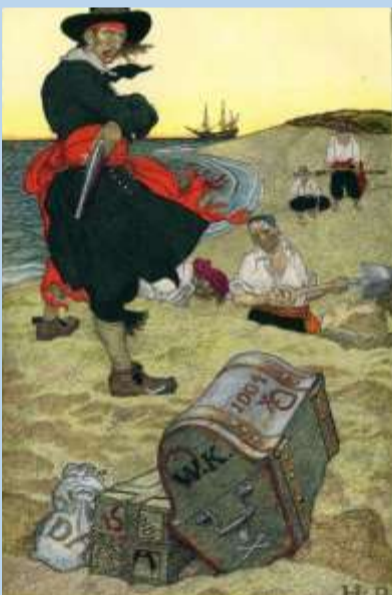


The Spanish Armada 1588

The Pirate Threat in the 1600s

In 1607, the Lord Lieutenant of Devon reported to the King's Council that:

'The inhabitants of Salcombe are sorely oppressed by pirates who come into the town in great numbers, 200 armed men at one time, and threaten to burn the town. They steal sheep and other commodities and take from poor fishermen their boats. Moreover, they murder each other and bury them in the sands by night.'



The Barbary Pirates

A still more terrifying threat came from the Barbary pirates of North Africa. Through-out the seventeenth century, their lateen-sailed *zebecs* terrorised the coasts of Devon and Cornwall

plundering shipping and seizing captives for the white slave trade. Finds from the protected Salcombe Cannon site near Moor Sands may have come from a Barbary pirate ship.



A Barbary Pirate Zebec

3. Defenders and Smugglers

The Civil War 1642-6

During the Civil War, Salcombe was a Royalist stronghold. Salcombe Castle, built in the reign of Henry VIII was strengthened and renamed Fort Charles and, under its protection, the harbour became a refuge for Royalist ships and a base for privateers. On 16 January 1646 it came under siege from Parliamentary forces. Battered by cannon on both sides of the estuary, it finally surrendered on 7 May 1642 - the last Royalist stronghold to fall in Devon.



The ruins of Fort Charles



Roundhead v Cavalier



*The Royalist commander
Sir Edmund Fortescue*



A reconstruction of Fort Charles

The Smuggling Trade

During the 1700s high customs and excise duties on imports, such as tea, tobacco, wine and spirits, led to a huge increase in smuggling along the South Devon coast. The small sloops and luggers used by local fisherman were especially adapted for voyages to the Channel Islands and Roscoff in Brittany. Customs officers at Salcombe and Hope Cove made regular seizures but often came under attack themselves. At Hope Cove Customs Officer Richard Cullin was murdered in 1785 and, three years later, his colleagues, Philip Cumming & Philip Cove, were savagely assaulted.



Smugglers being chased by a revenue cutter. Painting by Charles Hemy

4. The French Wars 1793-1815



Market Street with the old chapel



Seine netting in the Harbour

Watercolours by Rev. John Swete (1794)

Salcombe in the 1790s

In 1793 Salcombe was little more than an obscure fishing port with an unsavoury reputation for smuggling. During the long wars with France, which lasted between 1793 and 1815, the town played a small, but not insignificant, part with the sea off Salcombe Harbour providing the stage for both the first and the last naval events in home waters.

The Battle of Prawle Point: 18 June 1793

The first event was the action between HMS *Nymphe* and the French frigate *Cleopatre*. A jingoistic account in the Naval Chronicle claimed that ‘the capture of the French National Frigate *Cleopatre*, 40 guns, 320 men, by the *Nymphe*, 36 guns, 250 men, Captain Edward Pellew, was accomplished with a gallantry not to be paralleled in any country but our own, and vindicated the superiority of the British navy’



The Battle of Prawle Point



*Napoleon on board
HMS Bellerophon*

Napoleon Contemplates Suicide off Salcombe: 5-7 August 1815

The last naval event in home waters took place in August 1815 when the defeated Emperor Napoleon was a prisoner on board HMS *Bellerophon*. For two days the *Bellerophon* waited off the coast between Start Point & Bolt Head waiting for the ship that would transfer ‘Boney’ into exile on St Helena in the South Atlantic. It is said that Napoleon became increasingly depressed and at one stage he talked about ending his life.

5. The Salcombe Fruit Schooners

‘The Fruitship Port in Chief’

In 1835 the *Western Morning News* reported that ‘the maritime town of Salcombe has, within the last few years, risen to a degree of celebrity almost unexampled’. The town owed its growing fame to its beautiful clipper schooners, the ‘Salcombe fruiters’. These small, fine-lined vessels were built for speed and were specially adapted to race home with cargoes of highly perishable fruit from the Azores, Iberia and the Mediterranean to the ports of London, Liverpool, Bristol and Hull. With mainly local owners, masters and crews, the Salcombe schooners played a leading part in the fruit trade for nearly forty years.



The ‘orange schooner’ by Montague Dawson



The Salcombe schooner Isabella

The Azorean Orange Trade

Between November and April each year Salcombe schooners thrashed their way down to the Azores in the worst of the winter weather. With a perishable cargo under the hatches, speed had to be maintained on the return voyage whatever the conditions.

Salcombe Skippers

Salcombe skippers were known for their ‘hard driving’ and for bringing back fruit in good condition. According to the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* in 1850, ‘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’.



William Port



Thomas May



F W Hill



William F Date



George Jarvis



Edward Quick

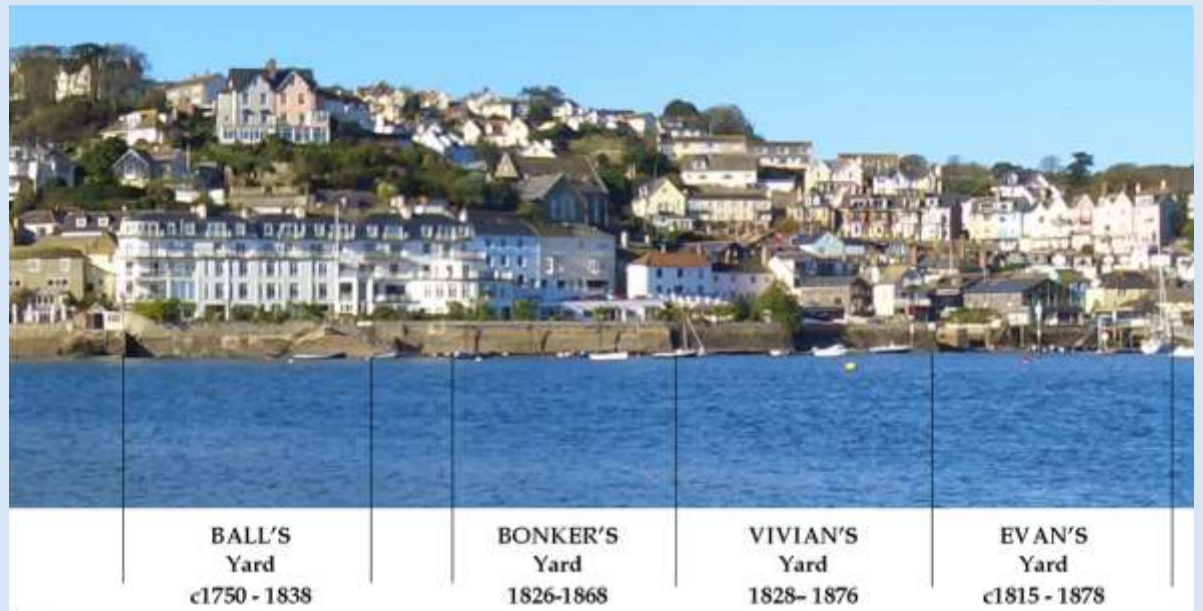
6. Shipbuilding: Boom & Bust

Shipbuilding

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.

As well as shipwrights, there were sailmakers, riggers, carpenters, shipsmiths and blockmakers, all busy fitting out and repairing ships.



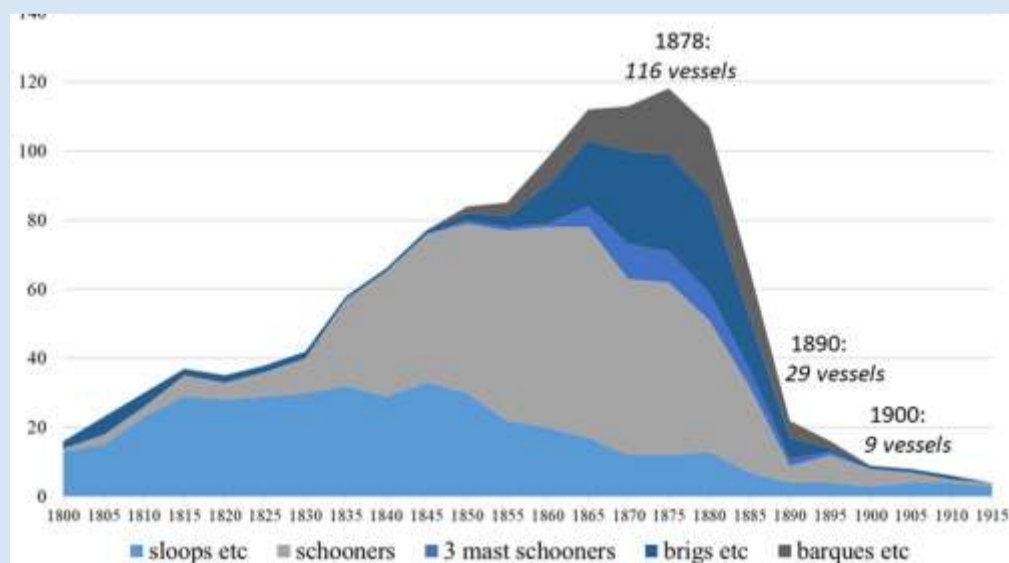
Salcombe: sites of the main shipbuilding yards



The Vivian and Evans' shipyards in the 1870s



The brig Phantom built by Elizabeth Evans



The size of the Salcombe merchant fleet 1800-1915

The Deep Sea Traders

When steamships started to capture the fruit trade in the 1860s, local shipowners and builders diversified into general cargo-carrying trades and built up a fleet of larger ships such as the 258 ton brig *Phantom* built in 1867 by Elizabeth Evans. The largest ship built in Salcombe was Vivian's 550 ton barque *Ocean Belle*.

The Years of Decline

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 Salcombe. The town suffered greatly in the 1880s and many of those engaged in maritime trades moved to larger ports to find work.

7. The Rise of Tourism from the 1890s

Salcombe finds a new role

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.

The sale of over 500 freehold housing plots at the top of the town, on land formerly owned by the Earl of Devon, also led to an influx of new residents.

The Marine Hotel opened in 1889 and the York Hotel a few years later. Salcombe Yacht Club was formed in 1894 by a group of 'gentlemen' sailors.



Kenwith Castle, an estuary paddle steamer



Above: York Hotel. Below: Marine Hotel



Salcombe in the early 1900s



Above & below: Fore Street



Above: Council Quay. Below: Fore Street



Photographs from the Fairweather Collection, courtesy of Kingsbridge Cookworthy Museum

In the photograph opposite a crowd has gathered in Fore Street to see off the fourteen young men who have enlisted for the (Western) Front. Judging by the placards on the GWR bus, waiting to take them to the railway station at Kingsbridge, the volunteers have all booked an excursion to Berlin. Sadly, only half of them would return.



The Salcombe Lifeboat Disaster, 27th October 1916

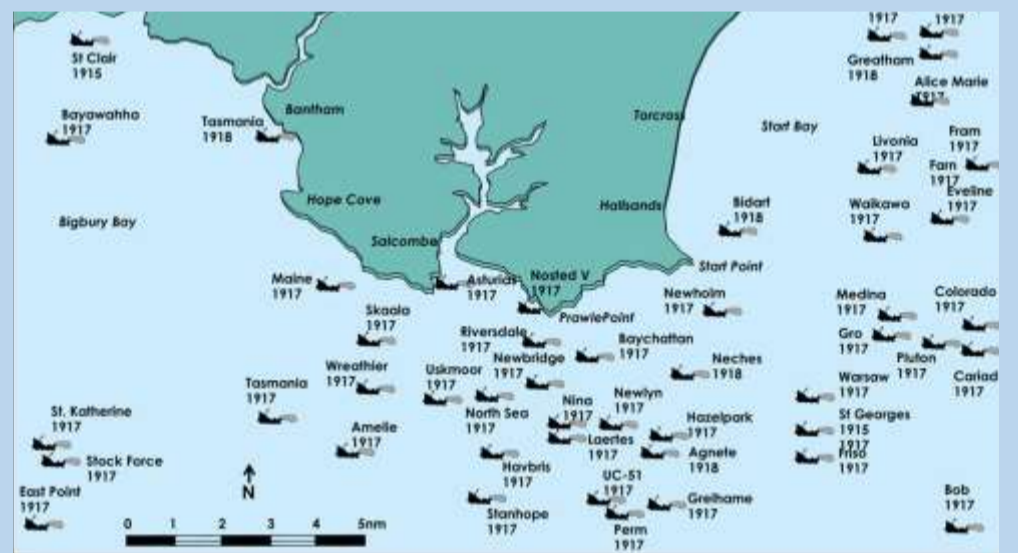


The U-Boat War off the Coast

In 1917 the waters off Salcombe became a notorious U-boat 'killing ground' with at least 25 British or allied merchant sunk. In the month before the arrival of Salcombe's replacement lifeboat, 4 ships were torpedoed off Salcombe in the space of just 3 days.

One of the victims was the hospital ship HMHS *Asturias*. Showing her lights and an illuminated red cross, *Asturias* was torpedoed without warning on 20 March 1917 and ran aground on the Eelstone near the entrance to Salcombe Harbour. 43 lives were lost. The attack caused international outrage.

On the morning of 27 October 1916, in the middle of the Great War, Salcombe suffered a terrible loss when the town's lifeboat, *William and Emma*, capsized near Salcombe Bar after returning from an abortive mission. Thirteen of the fifteen crew were drowned in what was one of the worst disasters in the history of the RNLI.



U-Boat victims off the South Hams Coast 1915-18

HMHS *Asturias* off the Eelstone, March 1917

9. Salcombe Between the Wars



Yachts dressed overall in the harbour



Salcombe Regatta in 1928

Yachting

Yacht racing flourished in the 1920s and 1930s. Salcombe Yacht Club, still the exclusive domain of gentlemen, developed its own sailing classes, notably the beautiful 20ft A class yachts, and the B and C class dinghies. In addition, there were the well-known Salcombe Yawls, adapted from traditional fishing boats.

The annual regattas were popular with locals and visitors alike, with large crowds lining the quays or perched on boats to watch the races.



A Class Racing Yachts

The Wreck of the *Herzogin Cecilie*, April 1936

On 25th April 1936, the famous Finnish windjammer, *Herzogin Cecilie*, winner of the Australian Grain Race, struck the Ham Stone off Soar Mill Cove. She was later towed into Starehole Bay where much of her grain was taken off but, with her back broken in a storm, all hopes of salvage were lost. She finally sank beneath the waves in 1939.



Herzogin Cecilie aground off Soar Mill Cove



Her final resting place in Starehole Bay

10. The Second World War

Wartime Salcombe

The Second World War had a dramatic impact on Salcombe. Many of its men and women went off to serve but their departure was outweighed by an influx of refugees from France and Belgium, evacuees from the cities and by the huge number of personnel from all three of the armed services based in and around Salcombe. After September 1943, the numbers swelled considerably with the arrival of nearly two thousand Americans at the US Navy Advanced Amphibious Base in the town.



Pictorial map by PAF Pearce

The Bombing Raids

After the fall of France the Luftwaffe started sending aircraft to attack the airbase at RAF Bolt Head as well as vessels in the estuary. Between June 1940 and March 1943, Salcombe suffered 11 bombing raids and 17 civilians lost their lives



Landing Craft repair at Mill Bay



Landing Craft repair at Whitestrand

The US Navy in Salcombe

The Americans took over much of the town between September 1943 and June 1944. Their primary role was to prepare landing craft for D-Day. The harbour soon filled up with landing craft of all types and between 3-5 June 1944, a US Navy Amphibious Force of 66 ships and 6 Royal Navy escorts sailed for Utah Beach, Normandy.



LSTs (Landing Ships Tank) in the harbour

11. Salcombe Since the War



Tourism

The town's popularity as a yachting and boating centre revived after the War and by the 1960s the town boasted as many as 24 hotels and 14 guest houses. Today most of the hotel accommodation has been replaced by apartments but the town remains as popular as ever with those who enjoy 'messaging about' on the water.



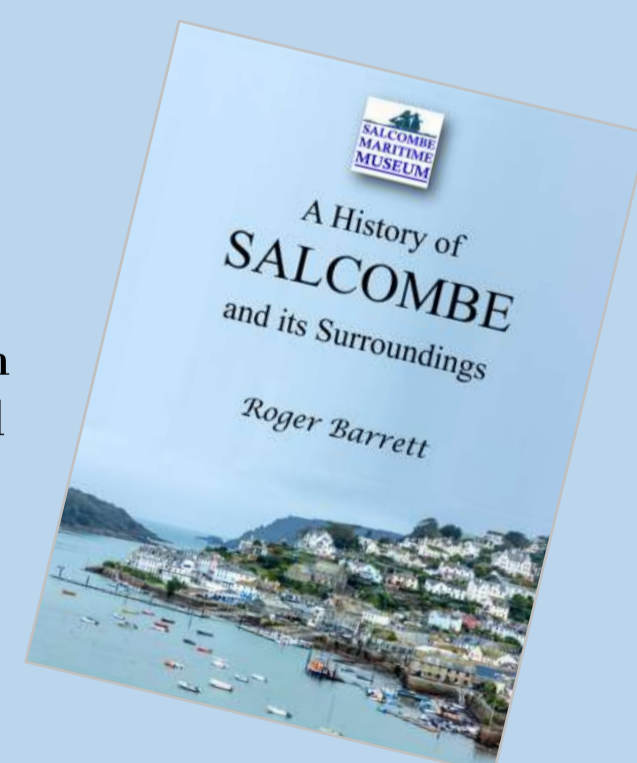
Boatbuilding

After the War, traditional wooden boatbuilding continued to be carried out at Whitestrand by Dornom's and in Island Street at a number of yards including Cove's. However, the advent of mass-produced fibreglass hulls from the 1960s led to a gradual decline. Mike Atfield, the last wooden boatbuilder, retired in 2017.



Fishing

Increased demand for crabs from the 1960s led to the expansion of fishing and in 1983 a Fish Quay was built off Gould Road. Today there are about 10 boats in the fleet.



Learn more about Salcombe's History

Written by the museum's curator, Roger Barrett, this 167 page book is the first full account of Salcombe's rich and varied history. 187 illustrations. All proceeds to Salcombe Maritime Museum

On sale here!
£12.95