



# CROSSING THE BAR

An Anthology of Poems and Ballads of  
Salcombe and the Kingsbridge Estuary







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Salcombe and the Kingsbridge Estuary

Compiled by Roger Barrett

Published by Salcombe Maritime Museum as a free downloadable pdf file  
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Revised with additional poems and ballads, June 2023

Do you have a poem or ballad to add to the collection?  
If so, please send it (or them) by email to the address above or post it to:

Salcombe Maritime Museum, Old Council Hall,  
Market Street, Salcombe, Devon, TQ8 8DE

Cover picture: The Salcombe Lifeboat Disaster, 27th October 1916  
*painting by Paul Deacon*

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## 1. SUNNY SALCOMBE

*by F. Ethel Foale*

There's a little place I'm loving, down in Devon by the sea,  
And its name is Sunny Salcombe, and it is so dear to me.  
You may go to many places, and be always on the roam,  
But I will still love Salcombe, for to me it's home, sweet home.

It's one of the prettiest spots, that you will find in Devon;  
And to me and mine it's really just a little bit of Heaven.  
If you need a rest and change, and something fresh to see,  
Then come down in the West, to Salcombe by the sea.

If you're fond of boating, and you like to bathe as well,  
Then Salcombe is the place to suit you really well.  
There's nice bays and coves, each side of the harbour here,  
So bring your bathing togs and don't forget your fishing gear.

If you're fond of walking, some beauty spots you'll find,  
Just a few of the nicest, I have got in my mind.  
There's the walk to Bolt Head, and around the cliffs to see  
All that's left of the wreck, the *Herzogin Cecilie*.\*

Then take the ferry boat, and go across from the pier,  
To the Portlemouth side, of the harbour there.  
You will get some pretty peeps, and that you'll find,  
And I know you will often have them in your mind.

You can walk around the Cliffs, as far as Prawle.  
It's a real good walk, and a sight to recall.  
You will pass Limebury Point, and Gara Rock, and then you'll  
be  
Overlooking the English Channel and have a lovely view of sea.

On that side of the harbour you can have a game of golf†  
If you don't feel too much like a worn-out colt.  
So if golf is in your line, at Gara Rock you'll find  
The fields for a game, and a peace to suit your mind.

So when you're down and out, and you're feeling somewhat  
blue,  
Sunny Salcombe's just the place that will agree with you.  
So pack up all your kit and come along and see  
This pretty little spot down in the Westcountry.

*from 'Gleanings of Grace' published in Salcombe  
by F.Ethel Foale between 1936 and 1939*

*\*The famous Finnish windjammer Herzogin Cecilie was aground off Soar  
Mill Cove between 25 April and 19 June 1936. She was then towed to Starehole  
Bay, near Bolt Head and remained above the surface until 18 January 1939.*

*†A 9-hole golf course was laid out before the Second World War on Rickham  
Common to the west of the Gara Rock Guest House for the benefit of guests*

## 2. OUT BOLT WAY *by an old Salcombe Boy*

Often when the wintry gale  
Blows feather white the spray,  
I look again with boyish eyes  
At scenes out Bolt Head way.

The rambles of the far off days  
Live in my memory still,  
The road by which the meadow lay,  
The music of the mill.

The toilsome climb up South Sands hill,  
Across the heavy sand,  
And outward to the famous Bolt,  
The channel to command

Eastward the stately harbour stands,  
With ceaseless ebb and flow.  
How swiftly like the running tide,

The years! they come and go.  
I see again the fleet of ships  
That sailed to Newfoundland,  
And all the worthy Salcombe men  
By whom those ships were manned.

I hear the sailors' cheery note,  
The clanging of the chains  
The windlass song, the anchor free,  
They work with might and main.

The *Reindeer* tugs across the Bar  
Till sails fill with the breeze,  
And anxious women wait on shore  
While lovers scour the seas.

Across the years I still recall  
The shipwrecks I have seen,  
The *Amy*\* hard on Lymbery Point,  
The tea ship *Halloween*†

I bow my head in reverence deep,  
As sadly, I recall  
The sacrifice of Salcombe men,  
For a ship ashore at Prawle.

O Silent Bolt! Keep sentinel,  
While storm winds around thee play,  
No headland bold can be so grand,  
As the "Bolt " down Devon way.

*Source unknown*

*\*The Salcombe schooner Amy, with a cargo of dyewood from Colombia, stranded on Limebury Point at the entrance to the harbour on 19 November 1883 and became a total wreck.*

*† The crack tea clipper Halloween, sister of the Cutty Sark, was wrecked in Soar Mill Cove on 18 January 1887*

### 3. BOLT HEAD

*by R I Partridge*

I know a headland in the West,  
Where'er I roam, for me the best;  
If out-along you come with me,  
Past Sharp-i-tor, the Bolt you'll see,

Up through the bracken let us go,  
And now we look far down below;  
In front, the open sea is spread,  
Behind, the hills with rounded head.

Yon breakers mark the coast to Prawle,  
Whence crabbers hie their pots to haul,  
And here the harbour winds its way,  
Just like a river, you would say.

Around us beauty meets the eye,  
From land, from sea, from changeful sky;  
No spot of earth, where'er it be,  
Could ever hold such charm for me.

And how I loved it as a boy,  
In halcyon days of purest joy!  
As smugglers, how we held the cave  
And fought, the contraband to save!

The winter storms may fiercely blow,  
And waves bombard the rocks below;  
Through lightning, thunder, rain and hail,  
These crags, triumphant, spurn the gale.

Though age on age has rolled away,  
Still stands The Bolt, the same to-day;  
Its ancient rocks of darkest hue,  
Stood thus when Dover's cliffs were new.

Or earlier, as ocean slime,  
Lay formless, to abide the time,  
When, like a transformation scene,  
Fair Kent arose where sea had been.

These grim old rocks were aged then,  
Ere yet appeared the works of men—  
How strange that Art we so revere,  
Yet miss the greater glory here!

*From 'Songs of Salcombe & the West Country' by R.I. Partridge  
published by Folk Press, London in 1930*

#### 4. THE SALCOMBE SEAMAN'S FLAUNT TO THE PROUD PIRATE

*A Traditional ballad*

A lofty ship from Salcombe came,  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we;  
She had golden trucks, that shone like flame,  
On the bonny coasts of Barbary.

"Masthead, masthead," the captains hail,  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we;  
"Look out and round, d'ye see a sail?"  
On the bonny coasts of Barbary.

"There's a ship that looms like Beachy Head,"  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we;  
"Her banner aloft it blows out red,"  
On the bonny coasts of Barbary.

"Oh, ship ahoy, and where do you steer?"  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we;  
"Are you man-of-war, or privateer?"  
On the bonny coasts of Barbary.

"I am neither one of the two," said she,  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we;  
"I'm a pirate, looking for my fee,"  
On the bonny coasts of Barbary.

"I 'm a jolly pirate, out for gold:"  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we;  
"I will rummage through your after hold,"  
On the bonny coasts of Barbary.

The grumbling guns they flashed and roared,  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we;  
Till the pirate's masts went overboard,  
On the bonny coasts of Barbary.

They fired shots till the pirate's deck,  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we;  
Was blood and spars and broken wreck,  
On the bonny coasts of Barbary.

"O do not haul the red flag down,"  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we;  
"O keep all fast until we drown,"  
On the bonny coasts of Barbary.

They called for cans of wine, and drank,  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we;  
They sang their songs until she sank,  
On the bonny coasts of Barbary.

Now let us brew good cans of flip,  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we;  
And drink a bowl to the Salcombe ship,  
On the bonny coasts of Barbary.

And drink a bowl to the lad of fame,  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we;  
Who put the pirate ship to shame,  
On the bonny coasts of Barbary.

*from a collection of ballads compiled by Elizabeth Corbet Yeats  
and published in 'A Broadside', Cuala Press, Dundrum,  
County Dublin in July 1910*

## 5. CHRISTMAS 1903

*by John Masefield*

O, the sea breeze will be steady, and the tall ship's going trim,  
And the dark blue skies are paling, and the white stars burning dim;  
The long night watch is over, and the long sea-roving done,  
And yonder light is the Start Point light, and yonder comes the sun.

O, we have been with the Spaniards, and far and long on the sea;  
But there are the twisted chimneys, and the gnarled old inns on the quay.  
The wind blows keen as the day breaks, the roofs are white with the rime,  
And the church-bells ring as the sun comes up to call men in to Prime.

The church-bells rock and jangle, and there is peace on the earth.  
Peace and good will and plenty and Christmas games and mirth.  
O, the gold glints bright on the wind-vane as it shifts above the squire's house,  
And the water of the bar of Salcombe is muttering about the bows.

O, the salt sea tide of Salcombe, it wrinkles into wisps of foam,  
And the church-bells ring in Salcombe to ring poor sailors home.  
The belfry rocks as the bells ring, the chimes are merry as a song,  
They ring home wandering sailors who have been homeless long.

*from the Collected Poems of John Masefield (1878-1967)*

## 6. THE GOSSAMER

Wrecked near Prawle Point 1868

*by R I Partridge*

Out from London's mighty seaport  
Sailed the *Gossamer*\*,  
Queen of all her famous clippers,  
Longshoremen aver.

Under sail she was a beauty,  
Trim aloft, alow,  
Like a cloud of curving canvas,  
When the breezes blow.

But, the perils of the ocean  
*Gossamer* must brave,  
Making music in the waters,  
Mounting wave on wave.

Suddenly a fog enshrouds her  
Black as any pall;  
Through the darkness they are groping,  
Seeing naught at all.

All around they hear the fog horns,  
Giving call for call;  
They can only guess their bearings,  
Guess, and that is all.

Now behold her battered, broken,  
Of her beauty shorn,  
Spars and sails in tangled wreckage,  
Like a thing forlorn.

For her voyaging is ended  
On the rocks of Prawle,  
Wave on wave, as though triumphant,  
Sweeping over all.

Eager folk in crowds are dumping  
Salvage on the shore,  
Merchandise from London city,  
Like a Whiteley's store.

All along the coast 'tis lying,  
Scattered far and wide,  
Richest fabrics, like mere seaweed,  
Drifting with the tide.

Vain man's conquest of the ocean,  
Vain his vaunting pride!  
E'en his mightiest creations  
Ocean doth deride

Here we see the mighty fallen,  
Doomed to rise no more—  
Just a derelict, forsaken,  
Cumbering the shore.

Here within the Hallowed Acre  
Drowned men lie side by side;  
Here the Captain, and his dear one,  
In their sepulchre abide.

*from 'Songs of Salcombe & the West Country' by R.I. Partridge  
published by Folk Press, London in 1930*

*\*The clipper, Gossamer of Liverpool, bound from London to Adelaide, went ashore at Landing Cove, to the east of Prawle Point on Thursday, 10 December 1868. Thirteen lives were lost. Captain John Thomson and his newly-wed wife Barbara Kerr, together with several others were buried in St Sylvester's Churchyard, Chivelstone. See also the ballad 'The Melancholy Wreck of the Gossamer' by Tim Brooks (No. 30)*

## 7. THE BAR

The Salcombe Lifeboat Disaster 1916\*

*by R I Partridge*

Out-along the folks are watching  
Where the Bar gleams white;  
Wild and stormy is the outlook  
In the dawning light.

See! the lifeboat takes the water!  
They can hear their cries;  
Now the breaking Bar they're nearing,  
Where the danger lies.

'Will they cross it?' They are asking,  
'Ah! She's lost to view!'  
On the crest again she's mounting,  
And, 'Hurrah! she's through!'

Swiftly with the gale she's flying,  
Answering the call,  
Where the shipwrecked souls are stranded  
On the rocks of Prawle.

Weary are the hours of waiting,  
Wives and sweethearts, pale,  
When, from out the storm she's looming,  
Head against the gale.

But, the Bar! The crew are asking, ‘  
Is it aye, or nay?’  
‘Aye, she'll do it!’ cries the cox'n,  
‘Now my lads, give way!’

Suddenly a mighty billow  
Lifts her end o'er end.  
Father have them in Thy keeping,  
And their homes defend!

Sacrifice supreme they offered,  
Every soul save two,  
Men who simply did their duty,  
Yet were heroes true.

Henceforth when the Bar is breaking  
Sheer from side to side,  
Salcombe lads shall hear the story  
How they nobly died.

*from 'Songs of Salcombe & the West Country' by R.I. Partridge  
published by Folk Press, London in 1930*

*\* On 27 October 1916, thirteen of the fifteen-man crew of the Salcombe lifeboat  
William and Emma lost their lives when the lifeboat capsized in mountainous seas  
near Salcombe Bar after returning from a fruitless mission to assist the schooner  
Western Lass ashore at Langerstone Point, east of Prawle Point*

## 8. THE WILLIAM AND EMMA

### The Salcombe Lifeboat Disaster 1916

*Song by the Carrivick Sisters*

It was late October in 1916  
Fifteen brave men sailed out across the sea  
To save the schooner *Western Lass*  
Wrecked on Meg Rock

*And thirteen lives were lost that day  
Thirteen brave souls washed away  
Wives and children left at home  
Their loves ones stolen by an angry sea*

When they reached the ship they could plainly see  
That the crew had left and had just walked free  
The boat being so close to the shore  
No real danger at all

So they turned the lifeboat to head for home  
But the bar was now too rough to cross  
The boat was swallowed by the waves  
Drowning all but two

*And thirteen lives were lost that day  
Thirteen brave souls washed away  
Wives and children left at home  
Their loves ones stolen by an angry sea*

This song was written and performed by the highly-acclaimed Carrivick Sisters, Laura and Charlotte from the South Hams, to mark the centenary of the 1916 Disaster. The song is included on their album '10 Years Live' (2017) which can be purchased via <http://thecarrivicksisters.co.uk/>. The recording can also be heard at <https://thecarrivicksisters.bandcamp.com/track/the-william-and-emma>.

## 9. CROSSING THE BAR

*by Alfred, Lord Tennyson*

In 1889, the yacht *Sunbeam*, owned by Lord Brassey, was placed at the disposal of a convalescent Lord Tennyson who, in May of that year, put into Salcombe for a week and visited his friend, the eminent historian J.A. Froude, then residing at the Moulton. As the *Sunbeam* left the harbour on the evening of her departure, the sound of the church bells ringing for evensong and the hollow moaning of the waves are said to have inspired the poet laureate to write his famous poem *Crossing the Bar* – a metaphor for crossing into the afterlife with the Bar representing the barrier between life and death.

Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have crost the bar.

## 10. HERZOGIN CECILIE

The Loss of the Famous Windjammer *Herzogin Cecilie* in 1936

*A ballad by Ken Stephens*

Sounding down the Baltic where the wreck-mark buoys all peal  
She's the mighty, full-rigged ship, *Herzogin Cecilie*  
Gusting down the Channel, where the steamers never yield

*She's the mighty, full-rigged ship, Herzogin Cecilie*  
*Herzogin Cecilie, Herzogin Cecilie*  
*She's the mighty, full-rigged ship*  
*Herzogin Cecilie*

Leaning down through Biscay, where no watches get no meals  
Dawdling through the Doldrums, though the slightest breeze she feels

Roaring through the Forties with her yards stretched up like steel  
Tacking in the Tasman Sea where the squalls upon her steal

Running, easting for the Horn where the giant sperm-whales squeal  
Gale-bound off the Falklands where the Albatrosses wheel

Shipboard straining in her hull as the hurricane she feels  
Falmouth bound for orders where her passage time's revealed

Run upon the Bolt Tail in a mist to test her steel  
Hard ashore in Soar Mill Cove on the rocks that broke her keel  
She was the mighty, full-rigged ship, *Herzogin Cecilie*

*Written by Ken Stephens of Southampton in 1981 and published in*  
*'Songs of the South Devon Coast' by Rumpus, Dartington Hall Studio, 1986*

*\*The four-masted barque Herzogin Cecilie stranded off Soar Mill Cove on 25 April 1936*  
*shortly after she had won the Australian Grain Race from Port Lincoln to Falmouth*

## 11. SALCOMBE

*by R I Partridge*

Salcombe, so the old folks tell us  
Not so very long ago  
Was a famous little seaport—  
Money then was saved, you know.

Smell of tar, and click of mallet  
Came and went upon the breeze,  
Tokens of the workman's labour,  
And the wages he receives.

Then they built their brigs and schooners,  
Trim as seaman's heart could crave,  
And their ships in every ocean  
Rose and fell upon the wave.

And their men were rare good sailors,  
Master, mate, and tough A.B.,  
With the world-wide reputation  
Of their native West Country.

Sons of men who spied the Spaniards  
Coming from the coast of Spain,  
Met, and fought the great Armada,  
Sent them, vanquished, home again.

Vain their boast, and haughty title,  
Vain their ships and armament,  
For our sea-dogs went to meet them,  
And the tempest, Heaven-sent!

Yarns they'd spin us by the fathom,  
Vowing every word was true,  
All about the great sea serpent.  
In the moonlight plain to view.

How a derelict they boarded,  
Drifting rudderless at sea,  
With her blood-stained deck as witness  
Of a dreadful tragedy.

And about the Barbary pirates,  
With their swarthy cut-throat crew,  
Lurking mid the coastwise islands—  
How they bluffed, and baulked them, too.

" And," said one, " I'll take my davy,  
What I'm telling you is true,  
Once, I saw the Flying Dutchman,  
And, my God, her ghastly crew."

Juicy Nassau pines they brought us,  
Cocoa nuts just as they grew,  
Oranges from sweet St. Michaels,  
Figs, and currants from Corfu.

Sugarcane, as sweet as honey,  
Tamarind, guava, too.  
Liquorice we chewed like baccy,  
As all proper sailors do.

Gijon nuts in proper season,  
In the falling of the year,  
And at Christmas time we cracked them  
With the good old Christmas cheer.

But when came the day of sailing,  
It was sad to say " Good bye! "  
And the sailors' farewell chanty  
From the heart drew forth the sigh.

"Bound away! " They sang in chorus,  
Clanking windlass beating time,  
And the breezes wafted shoreward  
Shenadoah's mournful rhyme.

When the wolves of storm were howling,  
Like some drowning sailor's wail,  
Then the wife at home would shiver,  
For she knew the bark was frail.

But, when breezes fair were blowing,  
Husbands, sweethearts, homeward bound,  
How they chaffed each other gaily,  
And what pleasant jokes went round!

See the weather-beaten sailor  
Home again, where all is well,  
What it means to drop the anchor,  
Only sailormen can tell.

Now the ships have all departed,  
Once the people's joy and pride,  
Where the schooners road at anchor,  
Yachts alone swing with the tide.

*from 'Songs of Salcombe & the West Country' by R.I. Partridge  
published by Folk Press, London in 1930*

## 12. SALCOMBE SHIPYARDS A CENTURY BACK

*by Anne Born*

Imagine doing it now: Fairly impossible  
without juggernauts, tankers, aircraft, computers;  
but they did. Brought the upcountry timbers by cart  
from forests where man, horse, rope and labour

had felled and hauled enormous hearts of oak.  
They needed them, struggling through red miry lanes  
to the yards. From Kingsbridge and Dartmouth ropewalks  
the coils, hemp sinews and muscles, came

down-estuary. In the sail-lofts, now  
the Ferry Inn, great canvas triangles were sewn  
by strong hands and needles. Imagine six yards building  
three-masters here, a real-life scene

of real work. Ships grew so large  
that one bowsprit stretched quite across  
the street, in through a bedroom window, and  
cold comfort for that sleeper caused!

Ships and families were born, grew, lived and died  
together then, nourishing each other.  
At night in the Union or Victoria Arms  
talk was of cargo, voyages, drowning, disasters:

three hundred ships might shelter here from storm;  
imagine them, and also the halcyon days,  
the sun on sails homing to these safe shores  
where aloes and myrtles grew and the air as now was warm.

*from 'Salcombe Shipyards a Century Back' first published in a limited  
edition by the Cock Robin Press, Ashburton and re-published in 1979  
by Dartington Poetry Press, Totnes*

### 13. THE OLD CASTLE, SALCOMBE

*by R I Partridge*

This is the castle, old and grey,  
Long since abandoned to decay,  
So broken down it barely stands,  
Nor scarce a passing glance commands.

All ivy-grown, and sere with age,  
From out the past 'tis just a page  
Of England's story, when men fought  
For rights we share, so dearly bought.

For in its youth it had its day,  
When Cromwell's men it kept at bay,  
And men-at-arms from round about  
Withstood the foe, and kept him out.

The governor, a Fortescue\*,  
To Charles the King was staunch and true,  
And he had made it "verrie strong,"  
To stand a siege however long.

Great baskets filled with sand they stood  
To make the weaker places good,  
Where musket-men might make a stand,  
Whene'er the foe was close at hand.

Of cannon they had but a few,  
But men well skilled to lay them true,  
And muskets, halberts, pikes galore,  
So what could soldiers wish for more?

Of victuals they had got great store,  
And sack, and ale, as much or more,  
Wherein we see Sir Edmund's plan,  
To fortify the inner man.

And though the men were all too few,  
They manned the fort as men should do,  
Save only three, who, truth to say,  
Crept out at night, and "ran away."

And then was heard the cannon's roar,  
Re-echoing from shore to shore,  
With give-and-take from day to day,  
As shot for shot sped on its way.

For four long months the fight went on,  
And neither side could say they'd won—  
Our fighting men were winning fame,  
And folks acclaimed Sir Edmund's name.

And though at last the castle fell,  
They could with pride the story tell.  
They made the best defence of all—  
Their castle was the last to fall!

*\*Sir Edmund Fortescue of Fallapit*

*from 'Songs of Salcombe & the West Country' by R.I. Partridge  
published by Folk Press, London in 1930*

## 14. THE FLORA OF SALCOMBE

*by A.C. Albus*

The flowers, like many-hued jewels bright.  
Bless Salcombe's shores with fragrance, beauty, grace;  
And sparkle with the dew as in delight  
At their lot falling in so fair a place.

*from Merrell's Guide to Salcombe and Kingsbridge, 1928*

## 15. WRAP YOUR WINGS AROUND ME

*by W.E.S. Burner*

Morning is breaking—away on the hills  
Seabirds are calling in musical trills.  
Life on the Estuary—begins again  
Sunshine is with us,  
Instead of the rain.  
*Provident and Hoshi*  
Are ready for sea  
Shake out their sails  
So may it be.  
Long is their journey—down into the bay  
Fair winds go with them  
Friendship and spray.  
Welcome awaits them— home from afar  
Rollers in plenty  
On Salcombe Bar.

*from Green Pastures and Other Poems published in 1979 by W.E.S. Burner*

## 16. MARYKNOWLE VALLEY, SALCOMBE

*by W.E.S. Burner*

There is a valley—  
Running wild  
With primrose, bluebell and forget-me-not.  
Where!  
As a child,  
From gilded morn to shadowy eve  
I wandered!  
And nightly took my leave  
For dreamy slumbers;  
Nor has it greatly changed.  
And when I look back—  
I see the same tall, dark and leafy elms;  
That nearways overwhelm  
The fertile valley.

*from Green Pastures and Other Poems published in 1979 by W.E.S. Burner*

## 17. LOVELY SALCOMBE

*by B. Eves*

Salcombe, this pretty sea-side town,  
Blows the ozone from the sea,  
With the sweet, green sloping meadows  
Running with the shore to thee.

Portlemouth perched upon the hill,  
A peaceful village o'er the way,  
Where cattle in the fields are grazing,  
While the Ferry ply's all day.

Gay villas dotted here and there  
Peeping mid the foliage seen,  
Perfumed with the full-blown roses  
And the rare old myrtle green.

How beautiful the North Sands road,  
In shade, on a summer's day,  
The Fountain, Shelter with the seat,  
And the Cork Tree on the way.

Glorious with the evening sunset,  
Tinting all the craft at bay,  
Hangs the clustered sea-weed weeping,  
Hiding shell fish through the day.

And steaming slowly with the tide,  
Paddles the Salcombe steamer on,  
Waves the hand of some new lover  
Bathing in these coves along.

Batson's rustic farm and cottage,  
Meadow path and old stone stiles,  
Winding with the tidal river,  
Creeks and shady lanes for miles.

Wild Prawle Point's breezy rocky spot,  
Where the sea pinks nod to thee,  
Hazy with the distant Sharp tors,  
Close beside the dashing sea.

View Salcombe in the pale moonlight,  
When the stars are peeping through,  
When the town is quietly sleeping  
With the shadows and the dew.

*Printed on a postcard in 1917, by James Fairweather of Salcombe*

## 18. SALTSTONE ROCK 1662

*by Anne Born*

In the estuary, two miles from the sea  
where the lake of Widegates spreads to the sky,  
and past the safest anchorage I know  
enfolded by little hills tenderly,  
is Salstone Rock, hidden when tide is high.

At ebb it is a modest ridge, an islet  
for curlews' meetings; or a cormorant  
may stand heraldically drying wings  
after a spell of diving. You may get  
a shelduck family making it their haunt.

Three hundred years since, others gathered there.  
When Charles returned, the nonconformist flock,  
their leaders and their God were out of mode  
and out of church. Their shelter was the air,  
and like the birds they met on Salstone Rock.

The displaced clergy took strength from their texts  
and fed their faithful; prayer flew high,  
and singing Rock of Ages each one knew  
his life an act of eternity that rests  
certain as rock is, be tide low or high.

*from 'Salcombe Shipyards A Century Back' first published in a limited  
edition by the Cock Robin Press, Ashburton and re-published in 1979  
by Dartington Poetry Press, Totnes*

## 19. FAREWELL TO KINGSBRIDGE

### *A Traditional Ballad*

On the ninth of November, at the dawning of the day,  
Ere we sailed unto New York, we did lie in the bay.  
O'er the fair fields of Kingsbridge the mist it lay grey,  
We were bound against the rebels of North America.

So sad was the parting twixt the soldiers and their wives,  
For none of them knew who might return with their lives.  
The women they wept and they've cursed the day,  
That we sailed against the rebels of North America.

The babes held up their arms with the saddest of cries,  
And the tears trickled down from their innocent eyes,  
That their red coated daddies must hasten away,  
And fight all with the rebels of North America.

So, God bless King George, I will finish my strain,  
And may his loyal subjects their honour maintain.  
God prosper their arms and their voyage across the sea,  
And pull down the proud rebels of North America

*from a collection by of ballads by Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould and  
published, with some alterations, in 'Songs of the South Devon  
Coast' by Rumpus, Dartington Hall Studio, 1986*

## 20. FOR KING AND COUNTRY

The Torpedoing of the Hospital Ship *Asturias*  
off Salcombe on 20 March 1917\*

*by Private W. Bennett, a survivor of the attack*

'Twas about the coldest day of March,  
When the *Asturias* was ploughing her way,  
Through the waters of the English Channel,  
Where she had steamed so many a day.

Over two hundred lives, at the dead of night.  
Dreamed of a time they thought so near,  
When men would meet their wives,  
And lads their sweethearts dear.

Then there came a dread explosion,  
A torpedo had found its goal,  
And what followed that fatal hour,  
Is things, that already have been told.

Thirteen of our chums and comrades,  
As soldiers, found a sailors grave,  
And a sister who we liked so well,  
For her dear country, a life she gave.

And we, their comrades, Holy Father,  
Pray to thee, in times so hard,  
For all the Mothers, Sweethearts, and Wives,  
That thou will help them, and be their guard

*\*On 20 March 1917 a German submarine torpedoed the hospital ship Asturias off Start Point, while it was on its way to Southampton. The Asturias was later beached at Salcombe where the survivors were treated with great care and compassion by local people. According to the final count, some thirty-five men and women died, including the captain.*

## 21. FAREWELL TO SALCOMBE

*Ballad by Stevie Harrold*

And so at last the day has come  
And I must be on my way  
I hope to be returning  
But when I couldn't say  
I'm off to join the war in France  
With all the lads I'll take my chance  
So pray for me,  
Here in Salcombe, by the sea

In the boatyards and the village farms  
We're brothers fighting arm in arm  
In a foreign field  
With our flag unfurled  
We'll risk our lives for a better world  
And when the times are bleak and hard  
I'll hold you closely to my heart  
And I'll always be  
Here in Salcombe, by the sea

One more time down Island Street  
To say farewell to the folks I meet  
The harbour view from off the Fore  
There's no other place like this I'm sure  
And when I'm feeling down and blue  
I'll close my eyes and think of you  
My heart will always be  
Here in Salcombe, by the sea

Stevie Harrold is British but is now a U.S. citizen living in California. He has strong Salcombe connections and a great fondness for the town. In October 2016, as a centenary tribute to the courage and sacrifice of the 1916 Salcombe Lifeboat Disaster crew, he and a group of friends and musicians came together in Los Angeles to perform 'The Ballad of the William & Emma'. All of the material was composed by this group and can be viewed on YouTube at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i36BN3GC3bY&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i36BN3GC3bY&feature=emb_logo). The lyrics of the opening song are set out above. Those of the remaining four songs can be seen at [www.stevieharrold.com/blank-c24vq](http://www.stevieharrold.com/blank-c24vq)

## 22. SALCOMBE

*by Joy Strawbridge*

I see a view with townie eyes  
Salcombe now before me lies.  
Devon I've not seen before,  
sparkling sea and sandy shore.

All summer long I'd like to stay  
in lovely Salcombe, if I may.  
I feel it's history 'neath my feet,  
not knowing that my love I'll meet.

Weather changes with the tide,  
to understand it I have tried,  
of Salcombe to be a part,  
so to know it's beating heart.

Visitors that come and go,  
time goes fast, time goes slow.  
Now the quiet winter days,  
fewer people, fewer stays.

All too soon we say goodbye,  
we'll write, we'll phone, still I cry.  
Homeward bound so far away,  
our time will come another day.

In Coventry City we are wed,  
return to Salcombe we have said,  
our family home will one day be,  
and urban friends will come to see.

Our children's heritage is here,  
lives lived with love, loss and cheer.  
of those who've gone before,  
I learn about, but still want more.

Where forebears lived, worked and played,  
I came once, and then I stayed.  
My final resting place shall be,  
here in Salcombe by the sea.

## 23. THE EXILE'S RETURN

*by R I Partridge*

One spot alone in all the earth  
Comes back to me where'er I roam,  
My little town, my place of birth,  
That bears for me the name of home.

For often will the fancy stray  
Amid the scenes of long ago,  
The same old rocks are there to-day,  
I see them like a passing show.

There stands the Bolt, whose grim old head  
Though aged, yet is still unbent,  
Whose rocks were there when sea o'er spread  
The chalky downs and cliffs of Kent.

I see the Bar, now gleaming white,  
Where relics of the drowned lie,  
Whose voice lone widows hear at night,  
Nor ever hear without a sigh.

And there the harbour, where the tide  
Lays bare the flats where shrimpers go,  
And likely spots where cockles hide,  
Or wily prawns dart to and fro.

Then up the creeks at harbour head,  
Where now the tidal waters flow,  
Each one an ancient river bed,  
But who can say how long ago?

I see the schooners as of yore,  
Swing slowly with the ebb and flow,  
And I can hear the sailors roar  
Their chanty when to sea they go.

There, too, the boys, young sailor men,  
Companions in adventure bold;  
The years are shed 'twixt now and then,  
And I forget that I am old.

\* \* \* \* \*

But now that I am home again,  
No well-known voices do I hear,  
For friends of old I look in vain,  
And I am but a stranger here.

And some within God's Acre lie,  
For some the legend, "Lost at sea,"  
And yet for me, they cannot die,  
While they come back to memory.

*From 'Songs of Salcombe & the West Country' by R. I. Partridge  
published by Folk Press, London in 1930*

There are as many as 93 poems in R. I. Partridge's lovely little book '*Songs of Salcombe & the West Country, The Afterthoughts of a Retired Schoolmaster*'. The following poem, 'The Smuggler's Secret', is, with the exception of Tennyson's 'Crossing the Bar', the only one reproduced in this anthology which does not cite a place-name which would set it firmly in the Salcombe area. It is included here as it is likely that Partridge based his story on the fate of Richard Cullin, a customs officer at Bantham, who, in 1785, was thrown over a cliff by smugglers at Hope Cove. His murderers were never found.

*\*R.I. Partridge was a former headmaster at St. Luke's College School, Exeter. He died in 1939 aged 83. His book is out-of-print, but secondhand copies can be purchased online.*

## 24. THE SMUGGLER'S SECRET

*by R I Partridge*

Old Tony was a fisherman,  
A famous smuggler too,  
And when they went a-smuggling, he  
Was skipper of the crew.

As fishermen, they'd put to sea,  
And, then *of course*, by chance,  
A lugger would be cruising there,  
With kegs from sunny France.

But how to land them? Tony cried,  
" We'll do it never fear!  
We'll smuggle through their legs my lads,  
And once again get clear! "

In cave, or copse, they hid the kegs,  
Or sank them in the sea,  
And every toper drank the health  
Of Tony, duty free.

But out-along, preventive men  
Patrolled the coast at night,  
And oft a warning pistol shot,  
Gave Tony such a fright.

And then one night the news went round.  
Of dreadful tragedy —  
A coastguard 'neath the cliff was found,  
As dead as he could be.

Old Tony had a tale to tell:  
Said he, " I saw him fall;  
We both of us were running hard,  
He slipped "— and that was all!

Some whispered " Murder " neath their breath  
Though accident 'twas called;  
Old friends now shunned him as he passed,  
And children fled appalled.

But some there were who pitied him,  
And tried to make him talk;  
Or bravely faced their neighbours' scorn,  
And joined him in a walk.

" Oh! not upon the cliffs," cried he,  
With eyes dilated wide,  
" I hear a voice a-calling me,  
To jump into the tide? "

Prophetic words they proved to be —  
It is the truth I tell —  
His body on the rocks was found,  
*Just where the coastguard fell!*

*from 'Songs of Salcombe & the West Country' by R.I. Partridge  
published by Folk Press, London in 1930*

## 25. A SONNET FOR KINGSBRIDGE

*by Rev. William Thomas Adey*

Since Wolcot, the Doctor, who lived on the Quay,  
No songster has tuned up a sonnet to thee;  
In honest thanksgiving I owe thee a song  
So many years living thy people among.  
Sly Peter was often a plague to thy peace,  
'Tis well that his order has failed to increase.  
To sing thee in satire is not my intent,  
The thing that is said is the thing that is meant.  
Thou art comely and cosy and everyway bright,  
Thou art thrifty and busy and cleanly and light.  
Thy streets are well cared for, thy markets are good;  
Thy houses are wholesome and so is thy food.  
Thy cream is well clotted, thy strawberries fine;  
But some love too fondly thy apple-tree wine.  
Of Churches and Chapels there's such a display,  
That every persuasion may have its own way;  
May they never forget, as the Church path they plod  
That Churches and Chapels should lead them to God.

*from Merrell's Guide to Salcombe and Kingsbridge, 1928*

## 25. A SALCOMBE LAD AM I

*by Joy Strawbridge*

*In memory of Jack Strawbridge*

I was born at Batson creek,  
fame and fortune I'll not seek.  
Little tacker that I be  
I'll spend my life beside the sea.

In Batson fields I freely roam  
tho' I'm never far from home.  
School days now, I'm on my way  
with tucker that will last the day.

School is out, the tide is in,  
maybe now I'll take a swim,  
or mosey around at Batson shore  
finding places to explore.

As I walk along the creek  
there is no company I seek.  
See the kilns that held the lime,  
then at Snapes the view is fine.

Salcombe town I look upon,  
see it's beauty in the sun.  
See men working at the quays  
building boats that sail the seas.

Hedgerows drip with bounty fair,  
a basket full for me to share.  
A misty morn at Hanger Mill,  
gathering mushrooms, have my fill.

As I'm grown, so I must toil,  
work this land of fertile soil.  
But when my time is free  
Batson creek is where I'll be.

As I stand beside the plough,  
"stand fast Beauty, steady now".  
We plough the fields way out at Prawle,  
on mellow days and winter squall.

A leaden sky foretells a storm,  
a seagull cry, so forlorn.  
I watch the waves crash o'er the bar,  
the dread of every vessel's tar.

My Grandfer sailed the ocean wave  
with seamen oh so bold and brave.  
He told those sailors from afar  
of Salcombe and its dangerous bar.

A rare night out in Salcombe town  
I play euchre as the pints slip down.  
Along the lanes I wend my way back,  
when an arm reaches out and takes my cap.

Not until the morning light  
I realise what caused my fright,  
for ‘twas just a wayward brier  
that snatched away my head attire.

Four children raised I give a sigh,  
a little tear is in my eye,  
my dear wife has gone before,  
but come the day we’ll meet once more.

Even though I’ve travelled far,  
in aeroplane and motor car,  
this little haven by the sea,  
Salcombe is the place for me

## 26. WHISPERS IN THE WIND

*by Joy Strawbridge*

A whisper in the wind  
hear voices from the past,  
tell the story, let them know  
these memories must last.

Feel the history everywhere  
to know of young men and old,  
hopes and yearnings fill the air  
for their story must be told.

One James Phillips of Batson went to sea  
so his young family could thrive,  
sailed on the schooner *Facility*  
with prayers said he’d survive.

With challenges near and far  
to carefully navigate,  
not least the Salcombe Bar  
where many met their fate.

A howling westerly gale  
or gentle salty breeze,  
she is rigged to sail  
her slender form with ease.

Tales are handed down  
of ships lost out at sea,  
tell of men that drowned,  
but those memory they'll be.

Romantic yarns are told  
of sea siren's dulcet voices,  
master and crew enchanted  
drawn onto rocks, with no choices.

James Phillips met his fate  
on the tall ship *Facility*,  
falling from a height  
succumbing to his injury.

Those left behind will mourn,  
say a good man we have lost,  
crewing to support his family  
his life though was the cost.

So when the wind doth blow  
or rainbow hues above,  
those of us who know  
think of voices full of love.  
Joy Strawbridge.

*Joy's poem is in memory of James Phillips who lost his life when he fell from the rigging of the Facility on March 10th 1840. The 111ton schooner Facility was lost five years later on Goodwin Sands, a ten-mile sandbank six miles off the Dover coast. Known as the 'ship swallower', the Sands are a graveyard of many good ships and seamen.*

## 27. BONFIRE HILL

*by Joy Strawbridge*

Down in Salcombe can be found  
an ancient piece of hallowed ground,  
where tombstones are black with grime,  
once carved with epitaphs of rhyme.

Now a place atop the hill,  
soldiers, Fathers, Mothers, all,  
some of many years some too few.  
The one I loved and people knew.

For 'tis on this windy hill  
Salcombe folk lie here still.  
A view of Salcombe estuary,  
loved by those we no longer see.

A place where once a bonfire high  
sending sparks into the sky.  
Now our prayers are sent above  
telling of eternal love.

Write an epitaph of glory,  
on a headstone carve the story,  
names, dates, not much to tell,  
but known to those who knew them well.

We take flowers, they don't last,  
but fade not memories of the past.  
Shed a tear and say "I miss you",  
though our visits are too few.

A sad farewell a long goodbye  
Salcombe folk around you lie.  
For all who rest within this place,  
REQUIESCANT in PACE

## 28. A VISITOR

*by Joy Strawbridge*

There's this little place we often go  
a lively town you'll love I know,  
we call it a jewel in deepest Devon  
a lovely seaside piece of heaven.

Next an estuary, tides ebb and flow  
you should see the mud when the water's low.  
With a variety of shops along Fore Street  
buy fudge at Cranch's for a treat.

Pause a while to enjoy a cream tea  
a delicious Devon speciality.  
A simple pasty or gourmet meal  
you'll find every kind of comestible.

Choose a pub and make merry  
or bathe on a beach reached by ferry,  
North sands valley or even South  
nearer to the estuary mouth.

At Cliff House gardens enjoy the view  
a pretty sight in front of you,  
on Saturdays there's sure to be  
a fleet of yawls racing on the sea.

Shopping, bathing, sailing, walks  
or just messing about in little boats.  
Visit the museum if you prefer  
to learn of shipwrecks and lives lived  
before.

Roads wind upwards from the town  
more houses now are all around.  
Well I must be on my way  
we're off to Salcombe this very day.

## 29. SOME CURIOUS EPITAPHS

### 1) East Portlemouth, St. Winwalloe's Churchyard

*On the grave of a child:*

Death takes the good—  
Too good on earth to stay;  
He leaves the bad—  
Too bad to take away.

*And on the tombstone of Richard Jarvis, who, in 1782,  
was poisoned by his servant girl. She was executed at  
Exeter, and her body burned:*

Through poison strong he was cut off,  
And brought to death at last:  
It was by his apprentice girl,  
On whom there's sentence pass'd.  
Oh may all people warning take,  
For she was burned to a stake.

### 2) Kingsbridge, St Edmund's Church

*On the outside chancel wall near the door, a stone  
inscribed in memory of Robert, commonly called Bone  
Philip, who died July 27th, 1793, aged 65 years.*

Here lie I at the Chancel Door,  
Here lie I because I'm poor,  
The forther in the more you'll pay;  
Here lie I as warm as they.

30. THE MELANCHOLY SHIPWRECK  
OF THE GOSSAMER

Wrecked near Prawle Point 1868

*A ballad by Tim Brooks\**

Take notice all, of what may befall,  
How your life may be held on a thread,  
A gossamer token  
so easily broken,  
Forever to lie with the dead

My name is John Thompson a Sea Captain bold,  
Just lately from China returned,  
and taken to wife  
the love of my life,  
Far better if she had me spurned

*Grass not waves shall cover our grave,  
Daisies shall mark where we sleep.  
So briefly together,  
but our love is forever.  
Stranger, do not weep.*

For eight long days we faced the gale,  
Till a homeward beat we'd found,  
First Start then Prawle  
We'll overhaul,  
Then clear through to Plymouth Sound

But the rip tide took us perilous close,  
The danger was seen too late,  
Both anchors dropped  
but nothing could stop,  
The Gossamer's terrible fate.

*Grass not waves shall cover our grave,  
Daisies shall mark where we sleep.  
So briefly together,  
but our love is forever.  
Stranger, do not weep.*

With a terrible rending she drove on the rocks,  
The great seas washing her deck,  
Now the Gossamer lay  
on the rocks of the bay,  
Could any be saved from the wreck?

Now Barbara Kerr had climbed to the deck,  
And she clung to her captain so brave,  
for to swim or to stay  
no one could say,  
and she trembled at every great wave.

*Grass not waves shall cover our grave,  
Daisies shall mark where we sleep.  
So briefly together,  
but our love is forever.  
Stranger, do not weep.*

Then a monstrous sea tore her from his grasp,  
John Thompson leapt into the swell,  
He'll save her or die  
on the rocks of the bay,  
Ringers sound your knell

Still tightly wrapt in each other's arms,  
Tossed ashore by the tempest they lay,  
and their lifeless bones  
to Chivelstone,  
Were gently borne away.

*Grass not waves shall cover our grave,  
Daisies shall mark where we sleep.  
So briefly together,  
but our love is forever.  
Stranger, do not weep.*

*\*Note: the chorus is copied from a verse posted in the Maritime Museum. Its source is unknown. See also the poem Gossamer by R.I. Partridge (No.6) and its footnote which provides background to the wreck.*

### 31. THE THURLESTONE WRECKERS

Verses occasioned by the late Wrecks, near  
Thurlestone, Devon, Jan 23, 1753

by Col. L\_\_\_\_\_ of T\_\_\_\_\_k, Devon

From Thurlestone's shores, O fly! Ne'r dare to trust,  
The cursed rabble of that hated coast.  
Where sailors oft' their hapless fate deplore,  
Who escaped the seas, are wrecked upon the shore.

For when the boisterous winds and raging deep,  
To this inhuman coast enforce the ship,  
Around the beach the rude barbarians stray,  
The vessel rend, and on the cargo prey.

By other's deaths they keep themselves alive,  
Subsist by robbery and by ruin thrive.  
May justice then, impartial justice, wake,  
And on these cannibals, due vengeance take!

*These verses were found in an old newspaper cutting dated 1753. Justice may have been slow 'to wake' for the local 'wreckers' were still carrying out their barbaric practices in 1772 when the barque Chanteloupe, homeward bound from Grenada for London, was dashed onto the reef that links Thurlestone Rock to the shore. The only survivors were a seaman and a wealthy female passenger. Wearing her valuable jewellery, she attracted the attention of the wreckers. 'The savage people from the adjacent villages, who were anxiously waiting for the wreck, seized and stript her of her clothes, even cutting off some of her fingers, and mangling her ears in their impatience to secure the jewels, and left her miserably to perish.'*

## 32. SALCOMBE GRACE

A ballad by Bob Freshwater of  
Back Beach Boyz of Teignmouth



Born in a shipyard in Kingsbridge  
To a family of schooners widespread  
Pegged on the bow 'neath the bowsprit  
Three fluttering jibs overhead  
Christened by Miss Gracie Hingston  
Wine bottle smashed onto the spar  
She sailed away down the estuary  
And out over Salcombe Bar

*Chorus:*  
*She wore a red paletot jacket*  
*Over a blue satin dress*  
*Her hair tied back with two ringlets*  
*Her elegant head-dress*  
*A posy of Devonshire flowers*  
*She carried from place to place*  
*Tranquility, joy and gentleness*  
*Beguiling... Salcombe Grace....*

For thirty odd years we crossed oceans  
Dodging Hurricanes, tropical storms  
Pods of whales and deep icebergs  
While leaving Newfoundland's St Johns  
Labrador currents and headwinds  
Thick fog smothering her face  
Eastbound lows on The Grand Banks  
Hastening through this harsh place

The October weather had broken  
Under tow from 'The Queen of the Exe'  
Heading for the shelter of Teignmouth  
To load china clay below decks.  
Entering by the West Way  
Rope parted in the gales and the rain  
Lodged in the rocks 'neath the headland  
Ness Sirens have done it again!

The owner messaged the Captain  
To salvage whatever he can  
Sell the rest for one shilling  
For any load carried home by one man.  
Captain Wyatt took his family's belongings  
Any items he couldn't replace  
His telescope, records and logbook  
And laid claim to the body of Grace

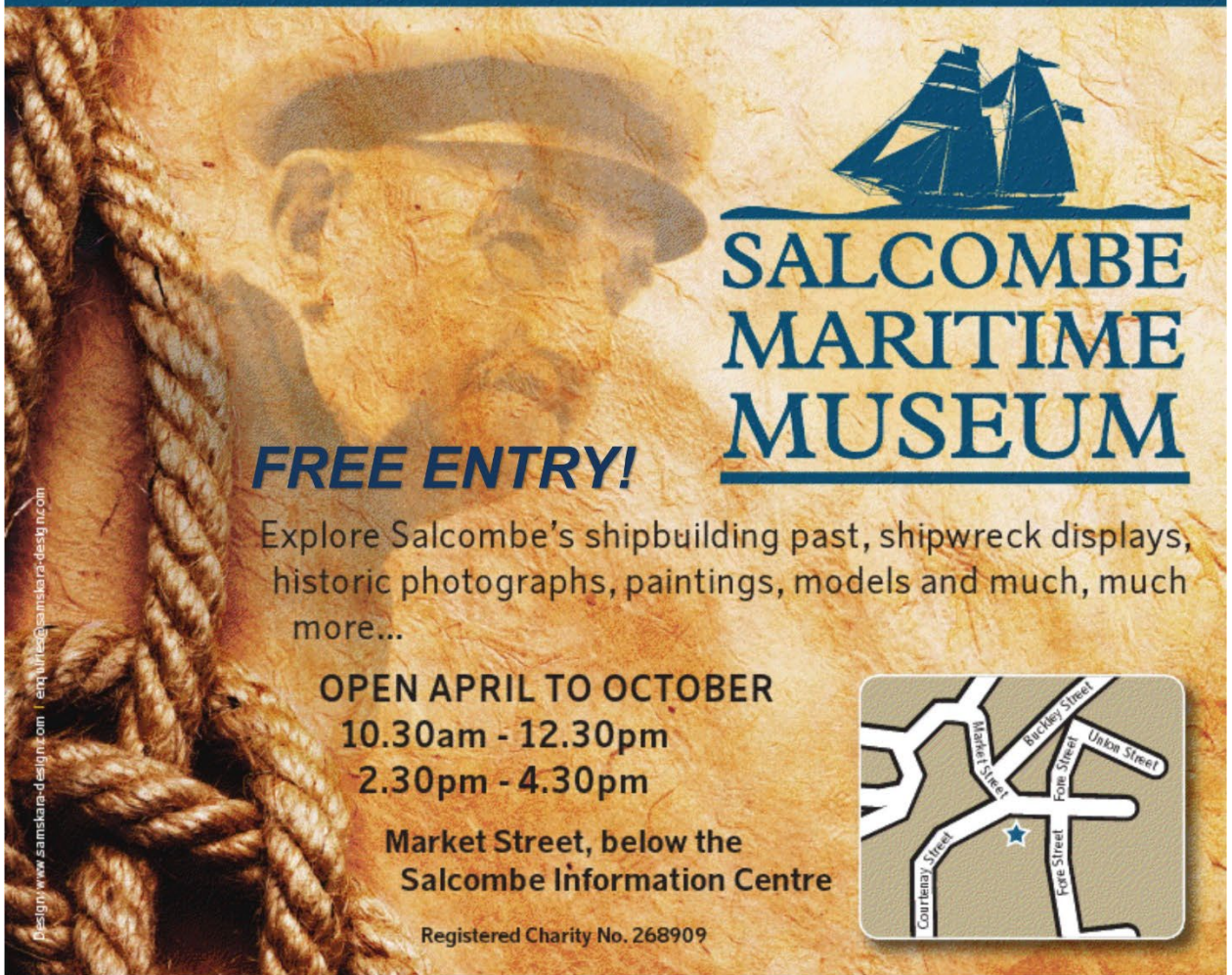
In the hall of George Wyatt's Family  
She stood more than one hundred years  
'til under a hammer in Knightsbridge  
Nine thousand five hundred appears  
No longer pegged beneath the bowsprit  
No more wind, or rain or tears  
But we'll keep alive her story  
Until our Grace re-appears.

*On 23 January 1869 the Kingsbridge Gazette reported that 'on Saturday morning a schooner [the 93ton Grace] intended for the fruit and Newfoundland trade was launched from Mr. Date's shipyard. She was christened by Miss Grace, daughter of Mr. P.O. Hingston and is to be sailed by Capt. Frink.' In December 1872 Grace was run down by an unknown steamer off Start Point and was little more than a bare hull when she was towed into Salcombe. Prior to 1883 Grace sailed mostly between Mediterranean and*

*Newfoundland ports but thereafter she was also regularly employed in home trades carrying coal, timber, cement and china clay. Ownership passed to William Beer in 1892 and to Charles H. Balkwill by 1904. In 1901 her then master, William Ellwood, was knocked overboard and drowned on a voyage to Newfoundland. It was after returning from Newfoundland in October 1907 that Grace was lost on Teignmouth bar. She was under tow and was coming in to load clay after having discharged her saltfish at Exeter. Bumping heavily on the bar the tow-rope parted and she drove ashore under the Ness. The Teignmouth Post reported that the Grace's keel and planks were as good as new and that 'few who saw her could believe she was 38 years old and had made so many voyages to Newfoundland and back'. (R. Barrett, Salcombe: Schooner Port)*



“ A veritable treasure trove of Salcombe's maritime past... ”



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MARITIME  
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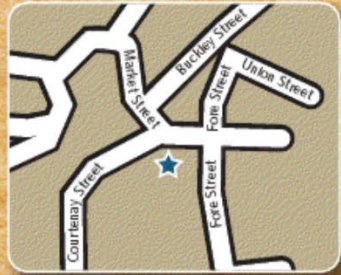
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