

“A little sea-bathing would set me up forever”: The History and Development of the English Seaside Resorts

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According to family tradition, when Mr. Austen retired and decided to move to Bath in 1800, both Cassandra and Jane were dismayed (Le Faye 113). Like Anne Elliot, they “persisted in a very determined, though very silent, disinclination for Bath” (*P* 135). But there was one compensation: each summer the Austens planned to take a holiday trip to the seaside. In the next five years, they visited Sidmouth, Dawlish, Weymouth, Worthing, Lyme Regis, and perhaps other resorts (Le Faye, 119, 121, 125, 134).

The sea was not always looked upon as a source of pleasure. The ancients considered it with feelings of terror and revulsion. The sea-gods Neptune and Poseidon had to be propitiated to control their wrath. Homer in *The Odyssey* used such phrases as “the malice of the sea,” “the ravenous main,” and “the cruell billowes” (Nicoll 12, 46, 210). Biblical accounts tell of Jonah being “swallowed up by a monster from the sea” (Jonah 1:17); Saint Paul was three times shipwrecked, his vessel “broken by the violence of the waves” (Acts 27:4); the destruction of Jerusalem was foretold by “the sea and the waves roaring” (Luke 21:25).

Mediæval maps bore legends such as “Here be monsters,” and the great expanses of unknown and mysterious oceans were decorated with drawings of terrifying creatures clasping ships with huge tentacles or crushing and capsizing vessels which dared the uncharted seas. Death and destruction lurked on all sides. The number of myths and legends of sea monsters testifies to the terror inspired by the sea.

The shore itself was a place especially to be shunned. Mediæval churchmen taught that at the time of Creation the shoreline had been smooth and even, and the ocean calm and peaceful. Then came the Flood and the land was devastated, the coast left in ruins with irregular indentations, jagged rocks, and islands scattered helter-skelter off the shore. The great swells of the waves and storms were vestiges remaining from the inundation.

It was at the shore that the ocean spewed out its most repulsive debris—decaying vegetation, rotting remains of drowned animals giving off poisonous vapours, the wreckage of foundered ships. And the shore was the point of entry for scourges from the sea: Viking and Saracen raiders; plagues spreading from the ports; pirates, wreckers

and smugglers who flouted the law and terrorized the populace (Corbin 13ff).

By the seventeenth century, however, the attitude to the sea was changing. Voyages of exploration had proved that the oceans, though vast, were not *limitless*; the horrible monsters were enormous, but only marine animals and fish. And as ships grew larger, the sea creatures seemed to be smaller. The myths and legends of antiquity were no longer accepted as truths. Satan and his devils were not taken so seriously and literally. Instead of concentrating on a terrible and fearsome God, clerics began to emphasize Biblical passages which stressed harnessing the waves and setting boundaries to the waters; the sea became the "blanket of the deep," covering the earth like a garment (Psalms 104:6).

The Age of Enlightenment fostered the study of natural history, and encouraged the collecting and classifying of rocks, shells and fossils. A new way of looking at the earth, and a new relationship with nature became widespread. The seashore was found to be an area of salubrity and cleanliness: salt prevented the water from spoiling and ensured the survival of fish. The coastline displayed God's purpose for man—the beaches and sand dunes formed a barrier to the sea; bays and inlets provided safe harbours for ships; reefs and offshore islands defended the ports; tides swept clean the shores (Corbin 24).

In England in the eighteenth century, the upper classes were concerned with their frailness, listlessness, lack of vigour. They felt themselves cut off from the rhythms of nature. This melancholy, or "spleen," could only be conquered by a change in the style of living, exercise in rural sports, variety of landscape, and therapeutic bathing. This was the great age of the inland spas with their warm medicinal mineral springs. [The word was pronounced and spelled "spaw" at this time.]

In the mid-eighteenth century, medical men began to recommend *cold* baths, and what better cold bath than the ocean? In 1752, Dr. Richard Russell published "A Dissertation on the Use of Sea-Water in the Diseases of the Glands. Particularly the Scurvy, Jaundice, King's Evil, Leprosy, and the Glandular Consumption" (Everitt 2). Dr. Russell was by no means the first to laud the benefits of seawater, but with lots of publicity, and his catchy slogan, "The Sea washes away all the Evils of Mankind," he became known far and wide for the miraculous cures from drinking seawater and bathing in the ocean. How much effect sea bathing really had on putrid fevers, glandular illnesses and melancholy, not to mention rickety children, anæmic girls and barren women, is hard to say, but certainly the

regimen of bathing daily would result in marvellous cures for any diseases which were the result of just plain dirt. Seawater therapy included bathing early in the morning, drinking at least half a pint of seawater, and massage with freshly collected seaweed. Bathers were advised to have some seawater thrown over their heads when first entering the sea, to equalize the temperature of the body, and to avoid propelling the blood to the head too swiftly. The bath was to be followed by half an hour of rest in bed, and then outdoor exercise.

Searches took place all around the coast to find the perfect beach: far enough away from a river mouth to ensure good salinity of the water; with flat hard sand so Bath chairs could easily cross it; bordered by cliffs and dunes for walking and riding exercise; with chalky soil and absence of swamps or forests. Some compromise was almost always necessary, but it became gradually accepted that the south coast of England, especially in Sussex and Devon, was superior: sheltered from northerly winds but exposed to sea breezes. Some resorts were considered especially bracing; others were more soothing and preferred for convalescents. With the rise of picturesque values, splendid seascape views became important. A frenzy of building took place in all the seaside resorts in the last decades of the eighteenth century, and the early nineteenth century.

When bathing, it was necessary to plunge vigorously into the water, to suffer the force of the waves, to feel a momentary sense of suffocation, to experience the shock of the cold water. But it was essential that bathing should be perfectly safe. It must be only a pretence that one could be knocked over, sucked under and nearly drown. The hard sandy slope was carefully chosen to give good secure footing, and professional helpers held the bathers steady while they were plunged in and submerged. The thought of this abrupt plunge into cold water and buffeting waves, especially for the first time, could terrify some bathers. Jane Austen mentions this in *Sanditon*, when Miss Diana Parker feels the need "to encourage Miss Lambe in taking her first Dip. She is so frightened, poor thing, that I promised to come & keep up her Spirits, & go in the Machine with her if she wished it" (424). Fanny Burney wrote of the first time she bathed, "I was terribly frightened, & really thought I should never have recovered from the Plunge—I had not Breath enough to speak for a minute or two, the shock was beyond expression great—but after I got back to the machine, I presently felt myself in a Glow that was delightful—it is the finest feeling in the World,—& will induce me to Bathe as often as will be safe" (Burney 302). The *safety* of bathing, even in summer, was always emphasized: medical advice and supervision were considered necessary.

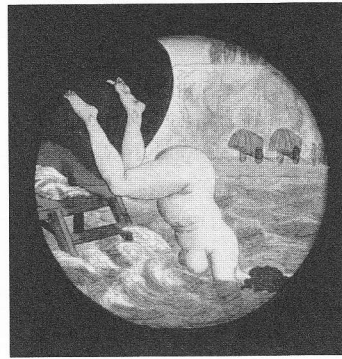
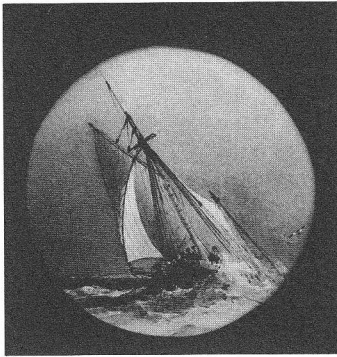
The earliest of the seaside resorts was Scarborough, in Yorkshire. Scarborough was a prominent spa town, with mineral springs, and was also on the coast, so it was natural for the town to combine cold sea bathing with the amenities already there. The earliest picture of a seaside resort is an engraving dated 1735, of the beach at Scarborough, and even then there are elegantly dressed ladies in carriages, gentlemen riding on the beach, bathers already in the water, others hesitating to take the first plunge, standing shivering at the edge of the beach. It was not long before other resorts grew up all along the coast, competing with each other—one claimed the saltiest water, another mentioned its lack of “surf and swell” experienced elsewhere, another touted its “bracing air.” But all developed along very similar lines. The history of almost every resort begins with the statement that it was “a small collection of fishermen’s cottages scattered along the beach” until seabathing became popular. Then preparations were made to cater for the visitors. A spare room in a fisherman’s cottage was the first type of lodging; later hotels and lodgings were built especially to provide accommodation for tourists; later still, when visitors liked their surroundings and decided to make longer stays, or live at the seaside, villas were built for new residents. In the early fishing villages, the cottages huddled together with their backs to the sea, and were built in sheltered coves or valleys. The streets led away from the beach, and were narrow and winding, to break the force of the cold winter winds. The later, more fashionable homes were built on wide crescents and terraces, parallel to the beach, with large windows to afford the best view of the sea. In these early years, the resorts were frequented by the upper and middle classes—the same people who visited the inland spas. Houses and streets were given eye-catching names: Trafalgar Court, Nelson Close, Waterloo House, Marine Parade.

In early pictures, men and women are openly bathing nude together. As time went on and bathing became fashionable, this was no longer acceptable—different resorts set various restrictions. In some cases, men bathed at a separate bay a little distance from the main beach; in other places, bells were rung to announce special times for women to bathe, other times for men. Eventually some sort of bathing costume was adopted for both men and women, made of heavy enough wool or flannel to avoid excessive clinging.

In spite of assurances that bathing costumes were always worn, caricaturists of the time invariably showed leering men with telescopes ogling nude females, and even serious paintings by well-reputed artists show women bathing naked.

In any case, essential equipment for a gentleman strolling along the promenade was a telescope to watch the shipping off shore; it would be mere chance if it occasionally happened to point the other way.

Nude bathing might have been accepted, but walking nude across the beach to get to the water was another matter. Hence the bathing machine. This feature common to almost every resort was still so novel and unusual in 1771 that Smollett in *Humphry Clinker*, felt it necessary to give a detailed description: “Image to yourself a small, snug, wooden chamber, fixed upon a wheel-carriage, having a door at each end, and on each side a little window above, a bench below—



The bather, ascending into this apartment by wooden steps, shuts himself in, and begins to undress, while the attendant yokes a horse to the end next the sea, and draws the carriage forwards, till the surface of the water is on a level with the floor of the dressing-room, then he moves and fixes the horse to the other end—The person within being stripped, opens the door to the seaward, where he finds the guide ready, and plunges headlong into the water—After having bathed, he re-ascends into the apartment, by the steps which had been shifted for that purpose, and puts on his clothes at his leisure, while the carriage is drawn back again upon the dry land; so that he has nothing further to do, but open the door, and come down as he went up” (Smollett 206).

The bathing machines proved indispensable, and were to be found at every seaside resort. Some of the bathing women, or “dippers,” became well known legends in their own time, famous for their rigour, firm discipline, muscularity, and salty language. Martha Gunn, for example, was a landmark at Brighton for seventy years.

Bathing machines lasted at the seaside well into this century, with scarcely any change in form.

There was no aspect of *pleasure* connected to sea bathing in its early days. Bathing, and drinking sea water, were considered medicinal, and the time and extent of the practice were strictly prescribed. Early morning, sometimes as early as 5 a.m., was considered the best time. Medical opinion considered any unnatural opening of the pores of the skin to be dangerous, and hence bathing took place when the body, and the water, were cold. The cold season of the year was also considered the most beneficial. Eliza de Feuillide, Jane Austen's cousin, took her delicate little son Hastings to Margate for sea-bathing in *January*. She was advised that "one month's bathing at this time of year was more efficacious than six at any other." Eliza wrote to another cousin, Philadelphia Walter: "The sea has strengthened [Hastings] wonderfully and I think has likewise been of great service to myself. I still continue bathing notwithstanding the severity of the weather and frost and snow, which I think somewhat courageous" (Lane 96).

As soon as the idea of "pleasure" became associated with seaside holidays, a more appropriate time of year was adopted. But too much sun was still a matter of apprehension, and early Fall was usually chosen as the best time. The Austens took their own holiday trips usually in September to November—perhaps, like Anne Elliot, "dreading the possible heats of September in all the white glare of Bath" (P 33). Fanny Burney visited Teignmouth in August and September, and Brighton in November (Burney 275). John Byng was at Weymouth in September (Andrews 87). Mary Musgrove bathed at Lyme towards the end of November, when she remained there to be "so very useful" after Louisa's fall (P 130); Mr. Elliot at the same time had been at Sidmouth (P 105).

What did they do all day, these visitors to the seaside resorts? The first item in the days' activities was sea bathing, followed by a prescribed rest period, and then exercise. Walks could be leisurely strolls along the sea front, on the sand or stone promenade or pier; for the more energetic, there were almost always long walks up to the headlands for beautiful panoramic views of the ocean and coastline, or inland to attractive little unspoilt villages.

Carriage drives up on the Downs along the cliff edge or through the woods, and riding on the hard sands or woodland trails took the visitors farther afield. If there was a busy port, they could watch boat-building, the excitement of vessels arriving and departing, the bustle of loading and unloading cargo. If there were still active fishermen, the day's duties could include purchasing fish for dinner, or watching

the fishing. For those with antiquarian interests, visits could be made to Saxon camps or Iron Age forts in the neighbourhood. Interest in the new science of natural history could be fostered by the collection of shells along the beach or of fossils in the eroding cliffs. Boats could be hired for excursions around the harbour; if the visitor had the proper connections, an inspection of one of the warships anchored off shore might be arranged.

For the ladies, there was always shopping. For the gentlemen, an invitation to shoot at one of the nearby estates might be forthcoming. In the evenings, there were the theatre, card parties and musical gatherings, and balls at the Assembly Rooms. And for everybody, the lending library which, besides books, newspapers and magazines, had all the functions of a gift shop, corner store and stationers combined. It was the social centre of the town—here one registered one's arrival, looked for the names of old acquaintances, met friends, planned expeditions, shared gossip and news.

Advertisements for the seaside resorts, and the visitors themselves, emphasized the pleasure and pastimes of holidays by the sea, but not everyone found the seaside delightful. Charles Lamb and his sister tried to recover the happy memories of their childhood, but did not succeed. He wrote: "We have been dull at Worthing one summer, duller at Brighton another, dullest at Eastbourn a third, and are at this moment doing dreary penance at—Hastings!—and all because we were happy many years ago for a brief week at Margate." Later he complains: "I cannot stand all day on the naked beach, watching the capricious hues of the sea, shifting like the colours of a dying mullet" (Brown 427).

The poet John Keats had a holiday at Teignmouth with his dying brother Tom one Spring. They were there for three weeks, with only an occasional fine day. He wrote to a friend: "You may say what you will of Devonshire: the truth is, it is a splashy, rainy, misty, snowy, foggy, haily, floody, muddy, slipshod county—the hills are very beautiful, when you get a sight of 'em—the Primroses are out, but then you are in—the Cliffs are of a fine deep Colour, but then the clouds are continually vieing with them . . . I fancy the very air of a deteriorating quality." But it is only fair to say that one letter reported: "I have enjoyed the most delightful walks these three fine days beautiful enough to make me content here all the summer could I stay" (Rollins 241, 273).

John Byng, Viscount Torrington, in his *Diary* wrote of his dislike of crowded watering-places: "They are, for a healthy person, a miserable way of killing time, and spending money; with new acquaintance for whom we care not a jot, and toss'd about in bad

company, and bad conversation; divested of quiet and comforts." At one point he sounds very like John Knightley in *Emma*: "That the healthy owners of parks, good houses and good beds, should quit them for confinement, dirt and misery, appears to me to be downright madness!" (Andrews 76, 83).

Most visitors reacted with delight to their experiences beside the sea. But there was a dark side to life at the seaside resorts at the end of the eighteenth century. The military camps at Brighton and other south coast ports may have been considered an entertainment by the visitors, and warships the object of pleasant water excursions, but to the *thinking* populace they were a sign of the possibility of an imminent invasion. With one brother in the militia and two on active service in the navy, Jane Austen could not help but be aware of the potential danger.

A force called the Sea Fencibles was raised, composed of local fishermen and farmers along the south coast. (Francis Austen was in command of one section.) Fortifications were built and manned all along the coast, and beacons were prepared on the headlands, to be lit as a warning at the first sign of attack. French prisoners were housed in a building in Southampton which Jane Austen would pass almost every day when she lived there.

The local gentry had mixed feelings about troops in their immediate area. Jane Austen wrote facetiously of the "evil intentions of the Guards" who were planning massive troop movements the day before the shooting season opened, disturbing the partridges and offering opportunities for poaching by the men. One of the neighbouring gentlemen, "under the influence of daughters and an expected ball," didn't want the regiments moved *away* from his part of the coast (*Letters*, No. 47: 169). This was while Napoleon was still camped at Boulogne and the danger of invasion was possible at any time.

Above all, in the older, poorer parts of every town the dirt and squalor and smell must have been nearly intolerable. Plain fishermen's cottages have been cleaned and painted and refurbished to make choice trendy modern homes that give no indication of their menial beginnings. In Jane Austen's time they must have been dreary, dark and dingy. And not just the *fishermen's* cottages: a friend wrote to the painter Constable about visiting a "poor curate living in one of our mud villages" . . . with "a dark low underground parlour . . . [and] comfortless walls," and he also described another house "standing in sea-bleached isolation" (Leslie 78).

John Byng could grumble when he went to buy fish: "No fish arriv'd today" (Andrews 74). Did he think of the fisherman who got

no money that day? The sailors rowing the King's boat—all fine-looking, specially chosen men—were admired, with no thought of press-gangs, floggings and squalid, cramped quarters. For fishermen and sailors, it was a hard, dangerous life.

The resorts were centres of wealth and conspicuous consumption among the upper-class residents and visitors. A middle class was present in the legal and medical professionals, teachers and private tutors, military officers, owners of shops and businesses. A large group was formed by those in personal service: domestic servants, laundry workers, cooks and landladies. At the base of the social structure were the local labourers, fishermen, boat builders, construction workers. It was generally a society with women strongly in the majority—servants, landladies, widows and spinsters. And it was essentially an older population, with few children, and few jobs for young men. Whatever work there was, in connection with tourism, building and fishing, was usually seasonal. "The impressive top-dressing of elegant houses and wealthy families, and the bustling prosperity of the holiday season . . ." should be contrasted with the "poor living conditions, high overheads, uncertain incomes and lack of resources" of a large part of the resident population (Walton 75-76).

Crime, too, was rife in the seaside resorts, as in any town. Pick-pockets and other thieves preyed especially on supposedly wealthy visitors. The local officials did their best to preserve law and order among the lower classes, and to restrain the excesses of young bucks like Tom Bertram and his friends with their "thoughtlessness and selfishness" (*MP* 462).

But, as Jane Austen wrote, "let other pens dwell on guilt and misery" (*MP* 461).

The seaside resorts vied with each other to capture the touring public, each advertising its own amenities and disparaging those of the others. Ramsgate and Margate in Kent were busy fishing ports which were constantly compared. Within easy reach of London, they sent small craft called "hoys" with fish to the city and brought back visitors. Ramsgate had a reputation of being less dignified and perhaps a little more profligate than Margate. It was to Ramsgate that Tom Bertram rushed to meet his rather disreputable friends right after his return from Antigua (*MP* 51); and it was at Ramsgate that Wickham tried to elope with Georgiana Darcy (*P&P* 201). The poet Cowper preferred Ramsgate, however, because he considered that resort quieter. He wrote to a friend: "You think Margate more lively. So is a Cheshire cheese full of mites more lively than a sound one" (Cowper 26).

Another pair of resorts were Southend and Cromer, whose rivalry was used to good effect in *Emma*. Jane Austen probably never visited either of them, but they were well-known and fashionable resorts by the early nineteenth century. Southend was an old name for a scattering of fishermen's huts on the Thames estuary—the “south end” of the parish—which grew from nineteen houses in 1780, to a population of over a thousand twenty years later (Everitt 9).

In *Emma*, John Knightley chose Southend for his holiday because of its nearness to London—an important factor when travelling with five children and “a competent number of nursery-maids” (*E* 101, 91). They probably travelled in their own carriages, although Southend was accessible by water also. Landing facilities, however, at low tide were bad—visitors were carried ashore on the backs of fishermen. One visitor wrote that Southend was a seaside resort, “only the sea gets such a long way off at low tide you almost doubt it” (Everitt 12). Those extensive mud flats exposed when the tide was out were considered a great disadvantage for Southend. Later, when the resort became very popular, it was known as “London on the Sea”—the facetious called it “London on the Mud.” Isabella's protest, “We never found the least inconvenience from the mud” (*E* 105) shows Jane Austen's attention to detail.

Cromer, on the other hand, was not so popular as a “family” resort. It was on the remote Norfolk coast, and the village was built up the steep hillside. In *Emma*, the apothecary Mr. Perry praised Cromer's “fine open sea . . . and very pure air” (*E* 105). Because of its distance from London and other centres of population, Cromer gained a reputation as an exclusive resort. Mr. Perry was considering setting up his own carriage (*E* 346). Taking a holiday at Cromer where he would be in contact with a better class of people, was another instance of his attempts at “upward mobility.”

After Mr. Austen's death in the beginning of 1805, Mrs. Austen and her daughters went to live in Southampton, sharing a house with Francis Austen and his new wife, Mary. The arrangement gave the Austen ladies inexpensive living accommodations, and provided company for Mary while the Captain was at sea. It proved satisfactory to all concerned.

The house was situated near the twelfth-century Bargate—one of the old entrances to the city—in Castle Square, bounded on one side by a fantastic “castle” built by the Marquis of Lansdowne. Jane Austen wrote: “We hear that we are envied our House by many people, & that the Garden is the best in the Town” (*Letters*, No. 50: 184). The garden extended down to the city walls, from the top of which could be seen a view over the estuary to the New Forest. The

sea almost surrounded the town, and gave it a feeling of space and freshness. The castle is no longer there, and Castle Square itself has been shrunk to a mere widening of one street. The house, too, has been torn down. A street replaces the garden, but the town walls are still there. The view now is over busy warehouses, cranes and dock facilities, but one of the houses still has its old name of "Forest View."

Southampton was badly damaged by wartime bombing, but Jane Austen would still recognize the lovely old Dolphin Hotel, rebuilt and modernized in the 1750s. Guests included Lord Nelson (the hotel has an original letter written to him there by his wife), and George III, who kept an apartment for himself and his friends with its own spiral staircase to the carriageway. What is now the Thackeray Restaurant upstairs (he wrote part of *Pendennis* while staying there) was the Long Room for assemblies and balls in Jane Austen's time. She wrote to Cassandra: "Our ball was rather more amusing than I expected . . . & I did not gape till the last quarter of an hour. . . . The room was tolerably full, & there were perhaps thirty couple of Dancers. . . . It was the same room in which we danced 15 years ago!" (*Letters*, No. 61: 236).

When Edward Austen finally offered his mother and sisters a cottage at Chawton in 1809, they were glad to move. There, back in the countryside with a permanent home and garden, Jane Austen could begin writing again. The early novels were revised, and the later ones written, in the peace of a small country village.

The experiences Jane Austen had had in seashore visits became important themes in her work. The seaside resorts do not figure much in the early novels. In *Northanger Abbey* Bath is the source of health and amusement, and the sea is not even thought of. In *Sense and Sensibility*, although Barton would have been within a few hours' drive of the sea coast, Sir John Middleton never planned a "complete party of pleasure" (*S&S* 62) in that direction. Dawlish is mentioned in connection with the rather stupid Robert Ferrars—he and Lucy go on their honeymoon to Dawlish, where Robert designed magnificent cottages and Lucy happily cut all her old acquaintances (*S&S* 376).

Brighton was often considered the gem of the seaside resorts. The Prince of Wales was delighted with the little town, had a farmhouse remodelled for himself, and later built the Marine Pavilion. With his arrival and sponsorship came fashion and gaiety. The Steine, an open grassy area which led down to the sea, and on which the fishermen used to spread out their nets to dry, became a popular meeting place. Brighton became a centre of fashion, with yacht

races, horse races, and a raffish young set following the Prince of Wales. The officers of the Prince's own regiment, and other military units camped just outside the town, were available and popular at the balls and assemblies. The bright uniforms in the streets, the parades, reviews, manœuvres and bands provided constant excitement. The Jane Austen character most avid to get to Brighton is Lydia Bennet—"a visit to Brighton comprised every possibility of earthly happiness" (*P&P* 232), but it was the camp and the officers, rather than the medicinal benefits of seawater, that sent her into raptures. Elizabeth speaks of Lydia's "wild volatility, assurance, and disdain of all restraint" (*P&P* 231)—there were many such young women there, and their doings were common knowledge. In *Mansfield Park*, Brighton was Maria Bertram's choice for a honeymoon with Mr. Rushworth (203), and this foretells the loss of her reputation later in London.

In the later novels, after Jane Austen had personally experienced visits to seaside resorts, the attraction of the sea is pervasive. Portsmouth, in *Mansfield Park*, is too much a naval base and busy port to be considered a seaside resort, but Jane Austen writes with real feeling about the Prices' Sunday walk on the ramparts: "The day was uncommonly lovely. It was really March; but it was April in its mild air, brisk soft wind, and bright sun . . . and every thing looked so beautiful under the influence of such a sky . . . with the ever-varying hues of the sea now at high water, dancing in its glee and dashing against the ramparts with so fine a sound" (*MP* 409).

Jane Austen would have known Portsmouth well. She made use of her knowledge of the old Garrison Chapel, surrounded by open space for the mustering of troops, where the Price family, "in their cleanest skins and best attire" (*MP* 408), worshipped every Sunday; the sallyport through the walls where William embarked in the boat which would take him to the *Thrush* (384); the Dockyard with its functional yet elegant Georgian buildings; and the ships tied up or at anchor in the harbour and bay—all showing Jane Austen's own "fine naval fervour" (*P* 167).

In *Emma*, the sea is at a distance, but forms a subject of conversation and speculation throughout the novel. The argument about the respective benefits and disadvantages of Southend and Cromer enlarges our knowledge of Mr. Woodhouse's hypochondria, Isabella's maternal obsessions, John Knightley's shortness of temper, Mr. Perry's pretension to status, and Emma's unfulfilled desire to see the sea.

But Weymouth is the resort which figures most prominently in the novel. Weymouth Bay is a beautiful crescent of sandy beach

bounded by headlands. An indication of the changing attitude to the sea can be found here—until the early eighteenth century, houses were built with their backs to the sea, and the shore was used as the town rubbish dump. Then came the rage for sea bathing: entrances were re-located, and tall Georgian residences were built along the sea shore, which was cleaned up and turned into an expanse of smooth golden sand.

It was Ralph Allen, a wealthy and influential resident of Bath, who first saw the potential in the little village of Weymouth. He made several summer visits, ordered by his doctor for the sea bathing, and then built himself a house at the harbour. He recommended the town and its climate to the Duke of Gloucester, who also built a house along the waterfront, known as Gloucester Lodge. He in turn persuaded his brother, King George III, to try bathing for his health, which was already causing concern to his family and the government. For the next fifteen years, the King and members of the Royal Family took annual holidays in Weymouth.

Whenever the King stepped out of his bathing machine and into the sea, the royal band, hidden in the next bathing machine, struck up “God save great George our King” as his head went under water. This original bathing machine, by the way, used by the King, has been preserved and is now in the town museum, with life-size figures of the King and his “dipper.” One disgruntled visitor complained, “I do not care at my time of life to be started out of a doze to rise hastily to my feet grabbing my hat off my head, every time the National Anthem is played as His Majesty takes a dip. Nor, as a physician, do I consider it at all beneficial to His Majesty’s delicate balance of mind to be continually trumpeted at” (Brander 54).

The townspeople were very grateful for the royal patronage. The King was honoured in 1810 with a statue at the centre of the Esplanade. And in the hills behind the town, a figure was cut into the turf showing the King on horseback. Unfortunately, he is shown riding *away* from Weymouth, and whether this was a bad omen or not, George III never again came to the seaside.

Mention of Weymouth in *Emma* allows Jane Austen to give hints about Frank Churchill’s life of idleness (“We hear of him forever at some watering-place or other,” grumbles Mr. Knightley [*E* 146]), and the previous acquaintance of Frank and Jane. Even in the brief references to the town, Jane Austen is able to give us a good idea of a seaside watering-place. There were musical evenings (“They had sung together once or twice it appeared, at Weymouth” [*E* 227]); balls (“If I mistake not that was danced at Weymouth” [*E* 242]); good shops (Mrs. Bates’s shawl was “bought at Weymouth, you know” [*E* 322]); and boating excursions (*E* 160).

It is in *Persuasion*, however, in the episode at Lyme, that Jane Austen reveals her deep feelings about the sea—"lingering . . . as all must linger and gaze on a first return to the sea, who ever deserve to look on it at all" (P 96).

The Austens were in Lyme Regis for two successive annual visits. Lyme was obviously Jane Austen's favourite spot on the sea. Certainly, in *Persuasion*, her enthusiasm and pleasure in the seaside are very evident. Lyme has changed, since her time. There is still the old inn with its projecting bow window, where the Uppercross party could have watched Mr. Elliot driving away in his carriage. But the peace and charm of the old village have disappeared.

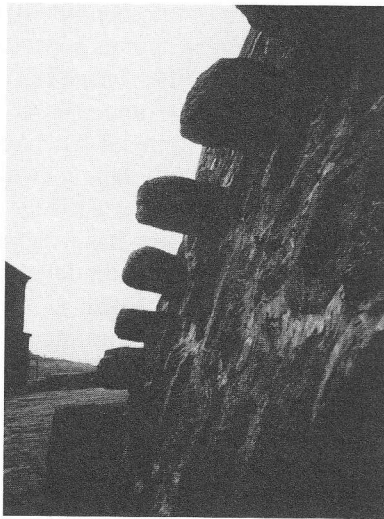


PHOTO: AUTHOR

The steps on the Cobb.

The description of Lyme—"the principal street almost hurrying into the water, the walk to the Cobb, skirting round the pleasant little bay . . . the Cobb itself, its old wonders and new improvements . . ." (P 95)—indicates an intimate knowledge of the town and the "retirement of Lyme in the winter" (P 97). Jane Austen's own feelings are probably echoed: "They went to the sands, to watch the flowing of the tide, which a fine south-easterly breeze was bringing in with all the grandeur which so flat a shore admitted. They praised the morning; gloried in the sea; sympathized in the delight of the fresh-feeling breeze" (P 102).

Specific incidents in the story no doubt recall her own visits there: "When they came to the steps, leading upwards from the beach, a

gentleman at the same moment preparing to come down, politely drew back, and stopped to give them way" (P 104). And, "There was too much wind to make the high part of the new Cobb pleasant for the ladies, and they agreed to get down the steps to the lower, and all were contented to pass quietly and carefully down the steep flight, excepting Louisa" (P 109). You remember what happened then.

When Captain Wentworth tells Anne: "The country round Lyme is very fine. I walked and rode a great deal; and the more I saw, the more I found to admire" (P 183), we feel he is echoing Jane Austen's own opinions. Some of the walks and rides he took would have been those Jane Austen mentions: "Charmouth, with its high grounds and extensive sweeps of country, and still more its sweet retired bay, backed by dark cliffs; the woody varieties of the cheerful village of Up Lyme, and, above all, Pinny, with its green chasms between romantic rocks, . . . a scene so wonderful and so lovely . . . must be visited, and visited again, to make the worth of Lyme understood" (P 95-96). The common walk along the cliffs to Pinny of Jane Austen's time is no longer there—the cliffs are constantly falling away and eroding. In the other direction, Charmouth remains a lovely destination for a walk, but again the cliffside she knew has disappeared.

In *Sanditon*, we can see a seaside resort developing exactly like the real ones all along the coast. It began as "a small cluster of Fishermen's Houses" at the mouth of "an inconsiderable stream" (383). It gradually developed into "a quiet Village of no pretensions" (378) at the foot of a hill—a church, some shops and a few cottages. Then the modern development began: the cottages were smartened up with white curtains to attract lodgers (383), new homes had trendy contemporary names like "Prospect House" and "Bellevue Cottage" (384); and "a short row of smart-looking Houses, called the Terrace" (384) was fronted by a broad gravel walk and green benches to take advantage of the view. Nearby, Sir Edward Denham is "running up a tasteful little Cottage Ornée" (377).

Here also are the hotel, the library, the "best milliner's shop," and a shoemaker's which is being transformed into a boutique with "Blue Shoes, & nankin Boots" (383-84). And here is the road down to the beach with its "fine hard Sand—Deep Water 10 yards from the Shore—no mud—no weeds—no slimy rocks" (369), and its all-important bathing machines (384). This centre of town, the "favourite spot for Beauty and Fashion" (384), is actually the commercial centre of Sanditon. Unlike her treatment of Lyme in *Persuasion*, Jane Austen here barely mentions the beauties of the cliffs and the sea; she concentrates on describing the mercantile aspects of the town: "old Stringer" selling Gardenstuff (381), cottages with "Lodg-

ings to Let” signs (383), and “Butchers & Bakers & Traders in general” (392). Lady Denham tries to sell asses’ milk and rent her “chamber-horse” (393). Mr. Parker is looking for a medical practitioner “to promote the rise & prosperity” of the town (372).

As in all seaside resort libraries, Mrs. Whitby, with the help of her glossy-curled and smartly-trinketed daughter, sells “everything, all the useless things in the World that c^d not be done without, & among so many pretty Temptations” were parasols and gloves, and “Drawers of rings and Broches” (390).

The Subscription Book at the library lists the visitors: mostly “Mrs.,” “Miss” and “Mr.,” but with a smattering of professionals—a doctor, a clergyman, a solicitor and two military men (389). Several of the women were probably widows, and there were twice as many women as men—typical of all the seaside resorts. They would mostly come in late summer, “August & September were the months” (389), and “stay their six weeks” (393).

The town has two big houses, but above them all, at the top of “our health-breathing Hill” (383), was Mr. Parker’s new home, Trafalgar House, “a light elegant Building standing in a small Lawn with a very young plantation round it” (384). He has moved from his old family home below, a “very snug-looking” house safely sheltered from winter storms, a “moderate-sized house, well fenced & planted, & rich in the Garden, orchard & Meadows which are the best embellishments of such a Dwelling” (379).

Mr. Parker sounds just like the many advertisements for seaside resorts, and Jane Austen must have enjoyed planning his warm and exuberant effusions: “The Sea air & Sea Bathing together were nearly infallible, one or the other of them being a match for every Disorder, of the Stomach, the Lungs or the Blood. . . . Nobody could catch cold by the Sea, Nobody wanted Appetite by the Sea, Nobody wanted Spirits, Nobody wanted Strength. . . . If the Sea breeze failed, the Sea-Bath was the certain corrective;—& where Bathing disagreed, the Sea Breeze alone was evidently designed by Nature for the cure” (373).

Jane Austen had only a few months to live when she began writing *Sanditon*. What wonderful hours of reminiscing she and Cassandra must have had, recalling the seaside resorts they had visited, the squalid fishermen’s cottages and elegant Georgian villas, the little shops and the lending libraries, the beaches and the bathing machines, and, always, the sea—waves crashing against the breakwaters or foaming gently up the sand, “dancing & sparkling in Sunshine and Freshness” (384).

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