Eating Out in Devon in the 1920s

A Tour of Selected Devon Cafés and Tea Rooms

Paul Cleave, Anne Corry & Julia Neville

'Eating out', or sitting in a café with a cup of tea or coffee or another (non-alcoholic) beverage, became a popular pastime during the 1920s among groups who would have been unlikely to do so before the First World War. People had more leisure time, and groups – particularly those where the head of household was employed in a skilled job or an administrative level of job – had enough disposable income for occasional treats.

The expansion of social clubs and similar organisations led to a demand for 'outings' or for venues to host events and meetings organised by groups. Some places to eat became very popular and well known in their particular locality. This essay gives an account of some of these establishments, both in Devon's principal towns and in areas of the countryside that charabancs and motor cars took people to explore. The following venues in urban areas are discussed: Bromley's Café in Barnstaple, Deller's Cafés in Exeter and Paignton, Clapp's Café in Exmouth, Temperance Café in Lynton, Goodbody's Café in Plymouth, Addison's Royal Café in Torquay and The Bungalow Café in Woolacombe. Included in rural areas are: Badgers Holt Tea Rooms in Dartmeet, Badlake Tea Cottage in Dawlish, Cleave Cottage in Lustleigh, Bridge Tea Gardens in Dunsford and Myrtleberry Tea Gardens in Watersmeet.

Venues in urban areas

Bromley's Café, 7 The Strand, Barnstaple

Arthur Bromley was a master baker and confectioner. With his wife Ellen, he set out in business in Barnstaple in 1908 in a shop and café in the High Street. Their business flourished, and in June 1923 they decided to take on and develop a larger property in the Strand which would allow them to expand their catering side of the business. There they developed what Mr Bromley later said, 'everyone admits to be one of the finest and most up-to-date cafés in the provinces.'[1]

The café quickly became a popular place for functions such as the Mayoral At Homes, or Rotary Club and Farmers; Union dinners. In 1928, it hosted over 400 people at a ball for the Devonshire Regiment's 6th Battalion. Rooms could also be booked by people wishing to give music or dancing lessons.

[1] *North Devon Journal*. 14 June 1928.

Figure 1: Bromley's Café, 7 The Strand, Barnstaple.[2]
(Photograph in Barnstaple Then and Now collection).[3]

In spite of the work involved in catering for the many functions they undertook for local organisations they did not lose sight of the more everyday needs of local people. By the end of the 1920s the café was advertised as 'the most cheerful spot in Barnstaple', claiming you could eat more economically there than at home.

The Most Cheerful Spot in Barnstaple
during the dull afternoons is
BROMLEY'S CAFÉ
BRIGHT, CHEERFUL & HOMELY
The Orchestra Plays Every Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 4. to 5.30
Dancing Every Thursday and Saturday
It is more economical to Lunch or Tea at Bromley's than it is at Home

Figure 2: Advertisement for Bromley's Café.[4]

[2] Thanks to the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon for their assistance with researching this venue. See 37: Bromleys at the Museum – Barum Curator (wordpress.com). Accessed 19 September 2024.
[3] JP, 'Bromleys – The Watergate – Barnstaple Then & Now,' *Barnstaple History*, https://www.barnstaplehistory.com/bromleys-the-watergate-barnstaple-then-now. Accessed 19 September 2024.
[4] *North Devon Journal*, 13 December 1928/

As well as the large establishment on the Strand, the Bromleys continued to run both their High Street shop and the café in Bideford High Street, which they had also bought in 1908, with Miss Crabb, the manageress, continuing in charge.

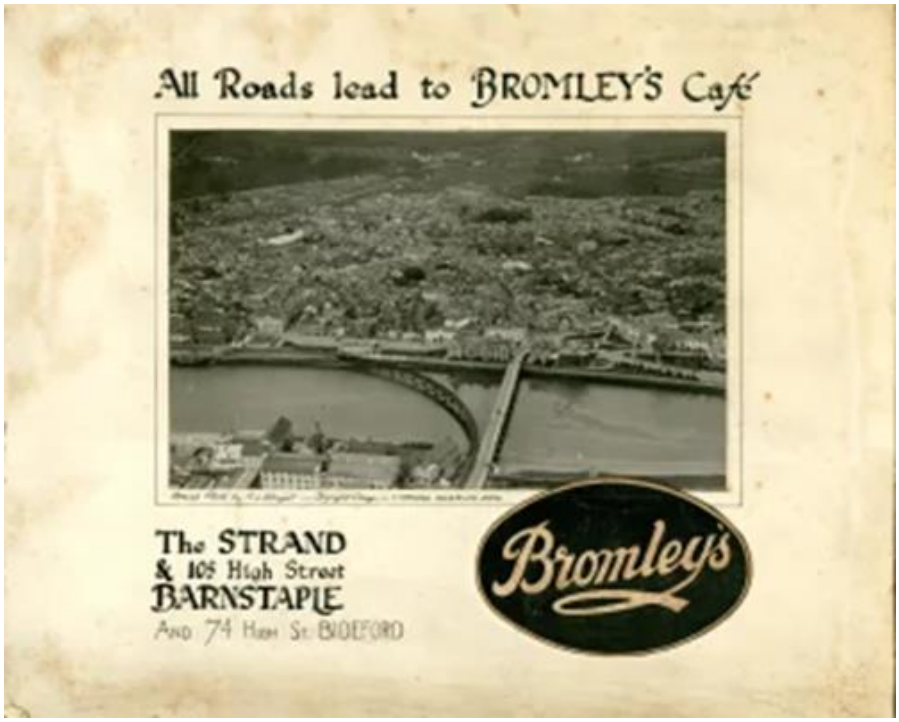

Figure 3: Advertisement for Bromley's Café, reproduced from their website.[5]

In 2025, Bromley's Café was a Wetherspoon pub called 'The Water Gate'.

Figure 4: The Water Gate, Barnstaple, © Google Earth, 2021.

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[5] https://barnstaplemuseum.org.uk/bromleys-at-the-museum/ accessed 3 January 2025.

Deller's Café, Bedford Street, Exeter

In 1916, Deller's (of Paignton, see page 10) opened their new café in Bedford Street, Exeter, succeeding an earlier one adjacent to the Royal Clarence Hotel in Cathedral Yard.

Figure 5: Site of Deller's Café, Exeter.
(Image courtesy Exeter Memories, www.exetermemories.co.uk.)

Like the Paignton café opened a few years earlier (see page 10), the Bedford Street café and its décor were designed by Henry Hyams in an opulent style echoing the vibrant continental cafés he had visited. The accommodation included not only the floors above and below the grand entrance but also, with an expansion in 1922, the floors above Lloyds Bank in the right of the picture above. This was where the ballroom, Bedford Room and rest room were situated. The steps of the entrance led to an atrium rising from the basement, which housed the main café, and through first- and second-floor galleries, as shown below.

Figure 6: First- and second-floor galleries in Deller's Café, Exeter.
(Postcard in Paul Cleave collection).

Menus and pricing were harmonised between the different Deller's cafés in the three centres of Paignton, Exeter and Taunton, and indeed by the mid-1920s tourists were encouraged to drive across the West Country stopping at each in turn, experiencing the West Country as 'Dellerland'.

The café in Exeter played host to many countywide events such as the Devon County branch of the National Union of Teachers and the Devonshire Regiment Old Comrades' Association. Its managers, Mr and Mrs L, Williams, in addition to arranging these private functions also gained a reputation for organising public events, such as their New Year's dinners and dances based around themes such as Tudor times, Scotland, ships and the sea, or the Continent. Less formally, to many in the city and the county it was somewhere 'special' where you were taken for an ice after going to the dentist, a birthday celebration or dinner before a trip to the Theatre Royal.

In 1923, Deller's opened a branch café in the High Street in Exeter with a food shop on the ground floor and a café above.

The Bedford Street café was destroyed in the Exeter Blitz in May 1942. Local historian and Exonian W.G. Hoskins, looking back in 1960, considered it 'perhaps the greatest single loss to Exeter in all the destruction of that terrible night'. He remarked that 'in its brief life of barely 25 years it had become part of the social history of the city; its disappearance has made Exeter a duller place.'

Figure 7: Deller's Café, after the Blitz.
(Image courtesy Exeter Memories, www.exetermemories.co.uk.)

The café in the High Street continued for some time after the war and was then used as a city centre shop.[6]

[6] For further information about the history of Deller's café in Exeter, see Exeter Memories, 'Deller's Café – High Street and Bedford Street', www.exetermemories.co.uk/em/dellers, and Deller's, https://dellerscafeexeter.co.uk.

Clapp's Café, 2 Rolle Street, Exmouth

Figure 8: Clapp's Café, 1929.[7]

Clapp's Café on the corner of Rolle Street in Exmouth was a business that had been established during the late nineteenth century, and the first occupant of this building when the street was completed in 1868.

During the 1920s it did a thriving trade providing teas for outings to Exmouth by groups as diverse as the Clyst Honiton bell ringers, the Ilminster Unitarian Church and the St Saviour's Women's Service from Bath. Enjoyment of the beach and trips on the steamers or up the river were followed by tea at Clapp's. In 1926, the Milverton choir outing arranged for the children to eat at Orchard's Café and spend time on the beach, while the 'older members' savoured luncheon at Clapp's before a more sedate river trip.

Local organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce hosted dinners there and Clapp's was licensed for music and dancing. During the 1920s, advertisements give a clue to the type of staff working there: an experienced chef 'for high class business'; a young lady assistant for high class baker and confectioner; an experienced woman cook to assist chef; a stillroom maid; and a thoroughly experienced counter hand.[8]

[7] www.culturegrid.org.uk/search/1687225, CC Licence.
[8] *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 10 August, 1919, 4 May 1928; *Western Morning News*, 4 February 1929.

In the 1920s, the café promoted not only its baked goods, luncheon and tea rooms but also its soda fountain and up-to-date refrigerators:

The building that housed Clapp's Café still exists, with the 1929 ornate ironwork that once suspended the sign shown in Figure 7 still in situ. After a long period in which it was used for a variety of shops (including a mobile phone shop, see Figure 9) it reopened in spring 2021 as a cocktail bar called Palm.[9]

Figure 9: Clapp's Café repurposed as a mobile phone shop.

Temperance Café, Queen Street, Lynton

In the 1920s, the Temperance Café, Queen Street, Lynton, was run by Emily and William Attree. The café had been established by Emily's parents, William and Emily Baker. When Emily married William Attree in 1923, William's father seems to have bought out the Bakers and handed on the business and the living quarters to the newly-weds.

[9] Palm, www.palmexmouth.com.

Figure 10: Promotional photograph of Queen Street, Lynton.[10]

Figure 10 is a modern glimpse of Queen Street, Lynton, including the present-day Queen's Hotel. The actual building on the street that the Attrees ran as a Temperance Café has not as yet been firmly identified, and Devon History Society would welcome any information that helps us place it on the map.

The temperance movement, promoting total abstinence from alcohol or, at the very least, moderation in consumption, had taken a strong hold at the end of the nineteenth century, and branches of temperance organisations had a vigorous presence in Lynton.

The Attrees seem to have made a success of their Temperance Café. In 1925 they opened for residential visitors and by 1928 the business was known as the Temperance Hotel. They were no doubt helped by the increase in the numbers of visitors brought to the picturesque town by charabanc or car. In 1929, William Attree complained to the council about the dirty condition of the streets on Sundays. The council agreed to start the Sunday street cleaning service at Easter rather than in June.

[10] Lynton & Lynmouth, 'The Queens', https://visitlyntonandlynmouth.com/visit/the-queens.

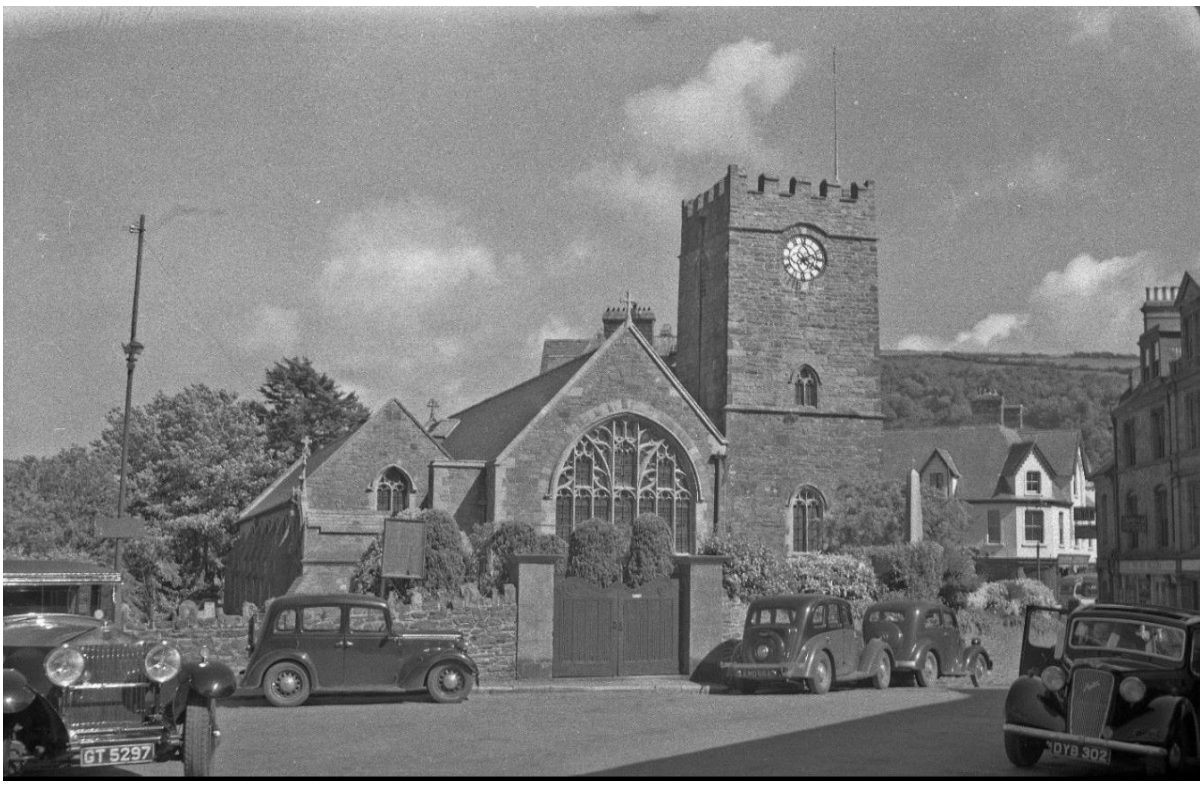

Figure 11: St Mary's Church, Lynton.
(Postcard in Julia Neville's collection).

Temperance establishments were reducing in numbers during the 1920s, but it was still possible to find temperance hotels in most Devon towns. There also remained a few pubs owned by the People's Refreshment House Association where alcoholic drinks would not be served. Those so far identified are the Avonwick Inn, the Red Lion at Broadclyst, the Fairmile Inn, the Church Inn at Holne, and the Plymstock Inn.

Deller's Café, Torbay Road, Paignton

In the early years of the twentieth century, Deller's Supply Stores was a well-known provision emporium and café in Paignton run by Mr William Lambshead, who had married into the Deller family. As the business grew, he decided to expand and commissioned Henry Hyams, a local architect, to design a new café for a site on the Torbay Road.

Figure 12: Torbay Road, Paignton.
(Postcard in Paul Cleave's collection).

Hyams had lived and travelled extensively in Europe and absorbed café culture there, and he brought that experience into his design for the new café. It was an Arts and Crafts building, described in the local paper at the time as in the 'modern Romanesque style', constructed in red brick with Beer stone facings. Through the pillared entrance hall, the visitor accessed the ground-floor café, a grand staircase leading to another large first floor room with a dance floor, and finally a balcony room looking over the gardens. On the top floor were the kitchens.

Figure 13: Ground floor of Deller's Café, Paignton.
(Postcard in Paul Cleave's collection).

The new building opened in November 1910 to warm reviews. The *Torquay Times* called it 'a wonderful café … a marvellous building … most artistic in design … for luxury, comfort and pleasure … absolutely unique in this part of the country.'[11] It proved an instant success, with both the design and the furnishings giving the visitor the experience of being somewhere slightly exotic.

Figure 15: Exterior of Deller's Café, Paignton.
(Postcard in Paul Cleave's collection.)

A particular feature of the design was a ground-floor veranda overlooking the gardens, a pleasant place to take tea even on a winter's day. Musical entertainment was provided by a trio of musicians playing three times a day, sometimes with visiting soloists.

Initial advertisements for the café in the 1920s did not refer to the 'exotic environment'. They stressed more mundane virtues. The price list quoted shows that you could have a filleted lemon sole for a shilling and threepence, braised steak and carrots for one shilling and ninepence and a portion of fruit salad for ninepence.[12]

Dining at Deller's
is a Pleasure
Dainty Surroundings
Splendid Service
Moderate Prices

Figure 16: Advertisement for Deller's Café, Paignton.

[11] *Torquay Times*, 11 November 1910
[12] *Torquay Times*, 7 April 1922, the source for this and the information in the following box advertisement.

Later, Deller's were less inhibited in their advertising. When the new soda fountain was installed in 1923 they took a full-column advert extolling the range of sundaes – from angel food to peach melba and the sunset sundae.

In 1928 Deller's opened a summer café on the seafront, which offered luncheons, dinners, teas and refreshments 'at Deller's usual prices' as well as 'music three times daily'.[13]

Sadly, business dwindled, the café closed and the buildings were demolished in 1965.

Goodbody's Cafés, Bedford Street, Plymouth

Figure 17: Goodbody's Café in Bedford Street, Plymouth.
(Courtesy of Brian Moseley, www.oldplymouth.uk.)

In the 1920s, brothers Charles and Walter Goodbody owned several cafés in Plymouth. Their first two cafés, set up before 1900, were in two of Plymouth's principal shopping streets: one at 45 George Street and the other at 20 Bedford Street.

By 1923 they had opened two further cafés at 14 Edgcumbe Street, Stoke (although there do not seem to be later references to this) and at 49 Mutley Plain. There was even a Goodbody's Café in Fleet Street, Torquay.

[13] *Torquay Times*, 14 May 1928,

In 1924 they turned their business into a company, Messrs C. A. and W. Goodbody Limited, and they continued to expand. In addition to casual visitors for their luncheons and teas, they provided rooms for events such as the Rotary Club weekly luncheon or the Annual General Meeting of the Plymouth Women's Hospital Fund.

In 1929 they took into partnership the local catering firm of H. Matthews and Sons, whose café was a little further down Bedford Street and who had the contract for providing refreshments at the new Hoe Pavilion, built by the City Council specifically for tourists and visitors.[14]

The additional accommodation in Bedford Street was remodelled and provided an arcade entrance from George Street, a lounge and a 200-seater venue for large events. They hired a larger 'orchestra' or band (saxophone, percussion, double bass and violin) and became well known as a dancing venue, with a polished woodblock floor, modern jazz playing and lots of foxtrots.

Figure 18: Interior of the 1929 Tea Room at 20 Bedford Street.
(Courtesy of Brian Moseley, www.oldplymouth.uk.)

That same year, the *Western Morning News* 'Woman in the West' columnist took up with Goodbody's the criticism offered by an actress back from America that 'there is not a decent meal to be had in Plymouth' and that Plymouth needed a few Americans to shake things up. The Goodbody's representative responded in a stately way that 'Plymouth was well abreast of the times' and that 'restaurant owners were realising the importance of catering for visitors', giving the example of the café on the Hoe, appreciated by 'visitors who came to Plymouth in charabancs'.[15]

[14] *Western Morning News*, 19 March 1929.
[15] *Western Morning News*, 21 October 1929.

Sadly, their principal cafés in Bedford Street and George Street were destroyed during the Plymouth Blitz. Their network of cafés and bakery shops survived until the business was sold in 1954, by which time they had reopened a restaurant on the new Royal Parade.

Figure 19: Bedford Street after the Blitz.
(Courtesy of Brian Moseley, www.oldplymouth.uk.)

Addison's Royal Café and Creamery, Cary Parade, Torquay

Figure 20: Addison's Royal Creamery and Café, with the hillside behind blanked out for advertising purposes.

(Postcard in Julia Neville's collection).

When Addison's Royal Creamery and Café was first set up on Cary Parade in Torquay before the First World War, it looked as in Figure 19. The venture proved successful and the building was extended upwards in 1922 along the original single-storey frontage to create a more extensive seating area.

Figure 21: Addison's Royal Creamery and Café after being extended in the 1920s.
(Postcard courtesy of Ipplepen Local History Group.)

As Figures 19 and 20 show, Addison's made a feature of Devonshire cream by post and Devonshire cream teas. There was a separate creamery area where customers could purchase cream and other gifts, either to take home or to have posted to friends far away.[16]

Figure 22: Interior of Addison's Royal Creamery and Café.
(Postcard in Julia Neville's collection.)

[16] *Torquay Times*, 10 October 1925.

Addison's became an institution in Torquay, providing hospitality for functions organised by local clubs such as the Rowing Club and Chess Club. It was the destination for staff and club outings from as far afield as Cornwall. In 1926, the new Torquay branch of the Vegetarian Society invited the National Secretary Mr J. Hough, who oversaw the café staff in the preparation of a three course meal consisting entirely of uncooked food.[17]

The café was so successful that another branch was opened in Paignton in 1927, a later one in Newton Abbot and another on the beach at Goodrington.

Figure 23: The Creamery at Addison's Café in Torquay.
(Postcard in Julia Neville's collection.)

The building was remodelled in the 1930s in an art deco style but demolished in the 1970s in favour of amusement arcades. This is what the site looks like today:

[17] *Torquay Times*, 12 November 1926.

Figure 24: The site of Addison's today (Google Earth, ©2021).

The Bungalow Café, Beach Road, Woolacombe

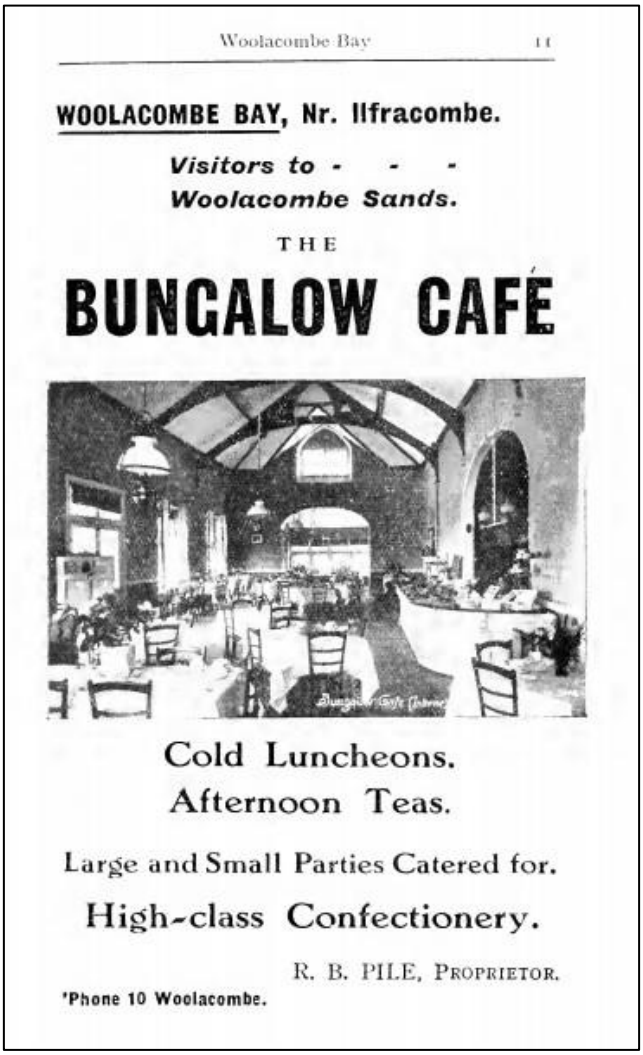

Figure 25: Advertisement for The Bungalow Café.
(Card in Julia Neville collection.)

Originally established by a Mr Southcombe before the First World War, the Bungalow Café was run during the 1920s by Mr and Mrs R. B. Pile. Mrs Pile used to regularly advertise at the start of the summer for additional staff – a cook-general, experienced waitresses, a 'young lady' for ices and minerals.[18] The café was a popular destination for outings organised by Women's Institutes and Sunday schools who came by charabanc or train to Mortehoe Station.[19]

During autumn and winter, the Piles made the café available for local groups. The Ex-servicemen's Club (the Royal British Legion) held whist drives there, and the local District Nursing Association held fundraising events such as concerts, sales of work and even a 'café chantant'. A Dr Barnardo's

[18] For example, *North Devon Journal,* 17 May 1923; 11 June 1924.
[19] For example, *North Devon Journal,* 2 August 1923, 21 July 1927.

speaker put on a ‘living pictures’ cinema show in 1921 as part of a national tour, and new organisations like the League of Nations held public meetings there to gain support.[20]

Figure 26: The interior of the Bungalow Café.
(Postcard in Julia Neville’s collection.)

In June 1926, Woolacombe was visited by a particularly ferocious storm. Damage was done along the seafront and the Bungalow Café had nearly all the panes of glass in its big windows damaged.[21]

The Bungalow Café still exists, but under the name of the Red Barn.[22]

Figure 27: The Red Barn (Google Earth © 2021).

[20] For example, *North Devon Journal,* 10 April 1924.
[21] *North Devon Journal*, 22 June 1926.
[22] The Red Barn, www.redbarnwoolacombe.co.uk.

Tea cottages and tea gardens

By the 1920s the idea of offering refreshments in rustic settings – cottages, cabins and gardens with outdoor furniture – had become a well-established part of the provision that Devonians made for visitors. Quite different from the town café, they helped visitors feel they were tapping in to a part of everyday rural lives.

Badgers Holt Tea Rooms, Dartmeet

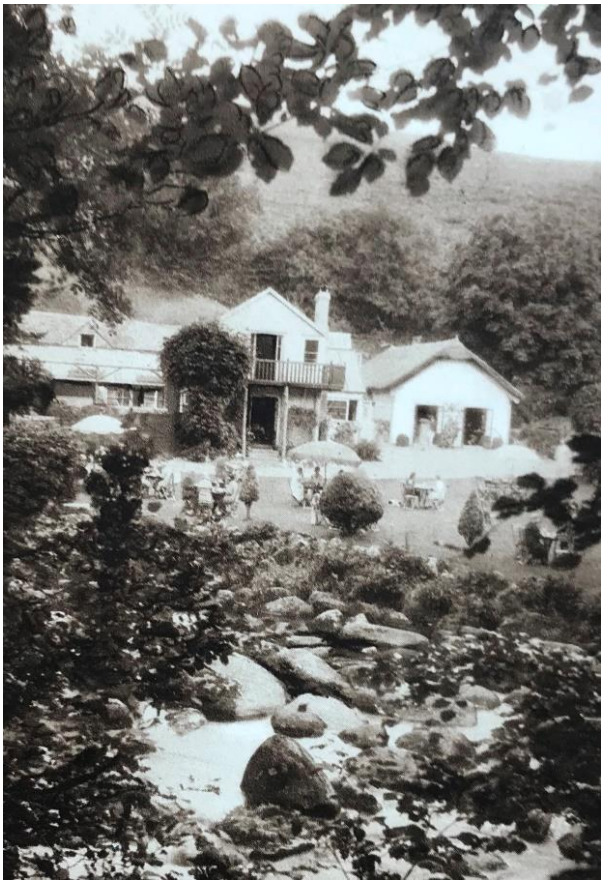

Figure 28: Badgers Holt Tea Rooms.
(Postcard in Julia Neville's collection.)

The current owners of Badgers Holt Tea Rooms describe on their website how the tea rooms were once two cottages, then a fishing lodge and finally 'in the early 1900s' it became the tea rooms that are there today.[23]

Research into local newspapers shows that a sale of farm animals and surplus equipment at Badgers Holt took place at the end of 1925 as the owner was leaving the neighbourhood. Advertisements for Badgers Holt Tea Rooms only appear from the spring of 1926, so probably the new owners were the ones to develop the tea rooms. The same advertisement then ran consistently in the *Torquay*

[23] https://www.badgersholtdartmoor.co.uk/

Times with minor changes only, such as the addition of a telephone number, throughout the rest of the 1920s.

DARTMEET

BADGERS HOLT supplies Luncheon or Tea to those visiting this renowned beauty spot

BADGERS HOLT stands in its own delightful Riverside Grounds

Parking Facilities *Closed Sundays until 3.30 p.m.*

Figure 29: Advertisement for Badgers Holt Tea Rooms.[24]

By 1927 the Eddystone Motor Tours from Princess Square, Torquay, were advertising a trip to Dartmeet and Badgers Holt on Sunday afternoons at a cost of five shillings. When Plymouth Town Council wanted to promote Plymouth as a 'Stepping Stone to Britain' for its American visitors, they arranged that tea at Badgers Holt would be one of the stops on a tour designed for 'representatives of leading national papers,' who they hoped would give the city and the moorland beyond a favourable write-up.

Figure 30: The lawn at Badgers Holt Tea Rooms.
(Postcard courtesy of Tom Greeves.)

[24] *Torquay Times*, 30 April 1926.

Business seems to have built up enough to require extra seasonal help by 1929, when an advertisement was placed for ‘two friends as resident washers-up’ and to cook vegetables and wait luncheons. The wages were 17 shillings and sixpence and 15 shillings weekly.[25]

Modern custodians of Dartmoor will probably not be surprised to find that as early as 1927 there were problems with the lighting of picnic fires in the neighbourhood. The proprietors wrote to the *Western Morning News* to denounce this and also referred to their keeper’s daily task of picking up the ‘paper, tins, glass bottles etc left by the thoughtless minority of visitors to this beautiful neighbourhood’.[26]

Figure 31: Badgers Holt in 2025, listed as ‘Venue and Accommodation’.[27]

Tea Cottage, Badlake Hill, Dawlish

Entrepreneurs in picturesque locations or venues made arrangements to serve refreshments to visitors inside or outside their own homes. One well-known ‘Tea Cottage’ was that on Badlake Hill on the Exeter road from Dawlish.

[25] *Western Morning News*, 30 June 1929.
[26] *Western Morning News,* 16 July 1927.
[27] www.badgersholtdartmoor.co.uk .2025.

Figure 32: 'Tea Cottage' on Badlake Hill.
(Image from a postcard in the Paul Cleave collection.)

This was run in the 1920s by Mrs Lane and her daughter, Elsie. It was evidently well known at the time, as there are numerous postcards of it, winter and summer. As with many of these private enterprises, little information about it and about the nature of the food and drink it served has survived.

In 1921 Sarah Lane (Mrs Lane) was living at the cottage, 3 Badlake Hill, as she had been at the time of the 1911 census. She was listed on both occasions as a charwoman, and her husband Samuel as a farm labourer. Her daughters Elsie and Beatrice were at that time working as factory hands in the aerated waters factory in Dawlish, so selling teas was a later development.

Cleave Cottage, Lustleigh

Inside the cottage door, visitors might look forward to a glimpse of indoor life in the main living room, as in this example from Cleave Cottage, with kettles hanging above the fire on the open hearth, the mantelpiece crammed with ornaments, and the table in the front window set for tea.

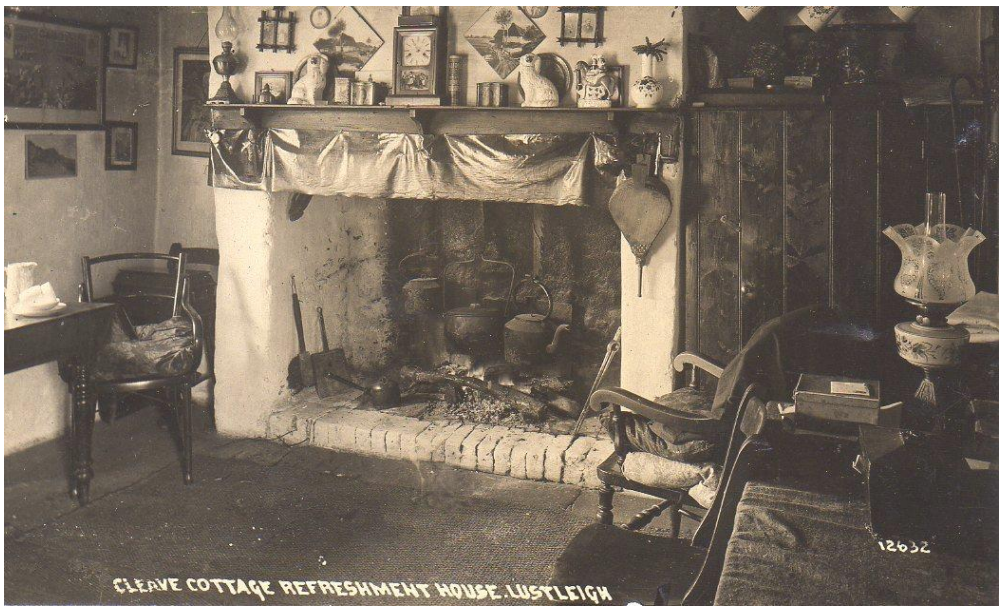

Figure 33: Cleave Cottage Refreshment House, Lustleigh.
(Postcard courtesy Lustleigh Archive.)

The popularity of recreational walking and hiking in the 1920s also led to the establishment of tea gardens offering views of nature around, with the promise of shelter in a chalet when needed.

Bridge Tea Gardens, Steps Bridge, Dunsford

Mr and Mrs Stone took advantage of the proximity of the picturesque River Teign at Steps Bridge to add tea gardens to their repertoire of businesses, which also included poultry rearing and a petrol pump.

Figure 34: Steps Bridge Café.
(Postcard in Julia Neville collection.)

Myrtleberry, Watersmeet, Lynton

William Attree of the Temperance Café in Lynton was the son of another William Attree who had for many years been running the Myrtleberry Tea Gardens in the romantic wild setting around the East Lyn River close to Watersmeet (now a National Trust tea room).

Figure 35: The setting for Myrtleberry and the Lynrock Factory.
(Postcard in Julia Neville's collection.)

When William Junior and his brother Cecil were demobilised after the First World War they invested their war gratuities and savings in the purchase of the Lynrock bottling plant, using the natural spring up by their father's property to bottle table water, soda, ginger beer and ginger ale.

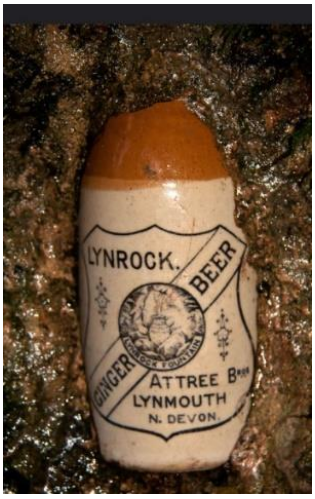

Figure 36: Ginger beer from the Lynrock bottling plant.
(Photograph by Mark Robinson, used under CC licence.)

They served their products to customers in a ‘comfortable chalet’ with seats dotted around outside. They also undertook a vigorous advertising campaign during 1920 to get their brand known nationally and internationally and probably one of the places on their delivery list was the Temperance Café.