Bovisand and Its Entrepreneurs

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On 14 June 1923, the *Western Morning News* reported:

> It is notified in naval orders at Devonport that Bovisand Pier and adjacent land, the property of the Admiralty, has been transferred to the Army Council, subject to the condition that the Admiralty reserves the free right to use the pier and to land passengers when required.[1]

As Bovisand was the only sandy beach near Plymouth it was very popular. In August 1923, the *Western Morning News* reported Bovisand was invaded by visitors on the bank holiday:

> The advent of the motor boat has introduced thousands of people to the beaches at Bovisand with the majority coming by motor boats. When evening came and the majority sought to go home the congestion became unmanageable. The sea was a packed with highway, boats scurrying to and fro as fast as they could go. At 11 p.m. many people were still on the quay, waiting for seats in the boats which were not to be had. An average of 4,000 visitors visited Bovisand each week.[2]

Figure 1: Children making sandcastles on Bovisand beach in April 1924.[3]

In 1924, not missing an opportunity, Messrs H. A. Saunders, B. S. Saunders, G. B. Saunders and A. E. Griffiths (Bovisand Sands and Pier Company Ltd.) came up with a scheme for developing Bovisand Bay. Their first step was to improve transport by which steam ferries

[1] *Western Morning News*, 14 June 1923.
[2] *Western Morning News*, 8 August 1923.
[3] *Western Morning News,* 19 April 1924.

and motor boats would run to and from Bovisand Bay to enable passengers to be landed easily. They also had plans to build a pier, which was going to be about 170 feet long, for landing purposes, though they reported that it was not outside the realms of possibility that a pleasure pier would be built in the near future.

> The company will take over the whole of Bovisand Bay, a matter of 50 acres of foreshore, beaches and greens and tea-houses, in the form of bungalows, will be erected on each of the five beaches. There will be a number of kiosks, at which tobacco; chocolates etc needed by holiday-makers will be obtainable.
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> Portions of the land will be sold to persons desirous of building bungalows and a part will be set aside for campers, who will be able to rent tent areas. It is hoped, too, in the near future to build a hotel, at which visitors will be able to stay.[4]

On 4 March 1925, The Bovisand Sands and Pier Company Ltd. held their first statutory meeting and the *Western Morning News* reported the following:

> The Company's directors had obtained very valuable considerations, which in the opinion of the architect and surveyor would save the company many hundreds of pounds. One of these was the acquisition of a very large quantity of building and road-making material lying in close proximity to the company's property at the cost of transport only. Not only was this of monetary advantage to the company, but the material being practically on the spot, development would be accelerated.
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> Owing to the bad weather intending purchasers of building plots had only recently commenced to confirm their inquiries, but work had now been put in hand for the erection of bungalows under the supervision of the architect of the company.
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> Numerous applications for camping-out sites have already been made and booked. There was plenty of room for much further growth and development and there was a widespread public who would see more of the company's seaside estate. He believed the financial year would close with a highly pleasing and satisfactory report.[5]

Bovisand's Chalet Café opened on 6 May 1925 with a ceremony. Mr P. Stewart Saunders, the secretary, said that they were a stage further in the progress of the work now being undertaken to bring Bovisand in line as a fully equipped seaside resort. He reported that the teahouses, tents and bathing boxes would be ready by Whitsuntide, when a long-desired connecting link between work and health would be established and appreciated by the inhabitants of Plymouth, Plympton and Plymstock, as well as visitors from all parts. They would also see an early start in building the proposed pier.[6] Also in May 1925, the Southern Railway started a Sunday train service because Bovisand had become a resort for Plymouth trippers.

In September 1925, William Easton and Charles Hemmett appeared before Ivybridge Police Court for carrying more passengers in a motor boat at Bovisand on 16 August than they were permitted to. Both were fined.[7]

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[4] *Western Morning News*, 29 October 1924.
[5] *Western Morning News*, 4 March 1925.
[6] *Western Morning News*, 8 May 1925.
[7] *Western Morning News*, 8 September 1925.

In October 1925 there was an unusual scene at Bovisand with the baptism by immersion in the sea of a Mormon 'convert'. The officiating priest was a good-looking young American who wore grey flannels and a white tennis shirt, and the 'convert' was a Plymouth girl, who wore a white robe covering her from head to foot.[8]

Bovisand Cliff could be a dangerous place, as illustrated by an inquest reported on a lad who died in March 1927, with the following response from Mr P. Stewart Saunders:

> The inquest on the lad who has recently died showed that he suffered from fits, and one can presume that, knowing the place from which he fell was only possible by first climbing through a War Department fence on one side or a hedge on the other side, the words of the Plymouth borough coroner (Mr J.A. Pearce) are untrue in fact and likely to cause unnecessary alarm amongst the visiting public. In fairness to the Bovisand Sands and Pier who own the greater portion of Bovisand Recreation Grounds, I should esteem your courteous consideration in giving due publicity to this communication.
>
> P. Stewart Saunders.[9]

In June 1927 it was felt that because of the increasing popularity of Bovisand there needed to be a constant presence of trained ambulance men and nurses to attend to any accidents. A new ambulance hut was erected.

In 1927 there were disagreements between boatmen and Steamer Companies. Mr W. H. Elford of Oreston and Turnchapel Steamboat Co, Ltd. wrote,

> When the motor boat service to Bovisand was first started, the company found that a considerable number of passengers who usually crossed to Turnchapel by steamer and walked to Bovisand had been diverted to the motor boats. After repeated inquiries from our passengers to run a service to Bovisand, we decided to do so, and rented a portion of Sutton Harbour jetty for that purpose, running a service every half hour, which we still continue (weather permitting).
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> One object in renting the jetty was that we did not wish to interfere with the boatmen, who at that time started from Phoenix Wharf and Mayflower Steps, but as soon as we started from the jetty, they swarmed to the North Quay steps, and any other landing they could reach that would be likely to divert passengers from our boats.
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> The new pier at Bovisand is the property of the Bovisand Sands and Pier Co and the Steamboat Co., both having spent considerable sums in its erection. About a year ago it was advertised that any boatmen wishing to use the new pier should apply to me. A few men did so, and had permission to land by paying a small sum; the others have made no application, but as soon as it was found that more passengers were returning from the new pier than was at first expected, the few boatmen using this pier were boycotted by the others and not allowed to take their turn with them when starting from Plymouth, unless they gave up the new pier, which they were compelled to do.
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> What those boatmen want I do not know. They cannot expect the Steamboat Co., to spend large sums of money on a landing and allow them to land free of charge; and we have a

[8] *Hull Daily Mail*, 28 October 1925.
[9] *Western Morning News*, 28 March 1927.

> perfect right to use the Government landing place when the weather is not suitable for the new pier, after playing the dues demanded.[10]

The arguments were so intense that councillors Williams, E. S. Leatherby and the mayor were involved on behalf of the boatmen. In August 1927, they were hoping for a satisfactory settlement concerning the question of landing facilities at Bovisand between the Plymouth boatmen who, with units of the fleet belonging to Oreston and Turnchapel Steamboat Co., Ltd, catered for the excursion traffic from the Barbican to Bovisand, where the Bovisand Sands and Pier Co had certain rights.

According to a representative of the men, it had been suggested that an agreement should be supported by all parties whereby both sides would refrain from using any point on North Quay as an embarkation point for Bovisand, but would concentrate on shipping passengers from the Mayflower steps; each boat to take its turn. The suggested agreement also stipulated that the motor boats shall not run to Turnchapel, but would share in the landing facilities at Bovisand, on the understanding that the passengers would pay ½d as a toll. 'We have offered the boatmen very good terms if they like to accept them',[11] said a representative of the steamboat company.

In 1931 upwards of 40,000 people passed through the toll house and paid the toll. The land provided ample space for camping sites and the beach facilities for safe bathing, but by September 1933 the *Western Morning News*'s heading was 'Bovisand's Future, Plymouth Playground on the Market'. They reported that a forthcoming sale by auction of the Bovisand Estate was to take place at Plymouth, with the rights for cafes and boat landings to go with the estate. The article stated that 'conjecture was raised as to the future of this popular holiday playground'.[12]

On 6 July 1935, Bovisand Sands and Pier Company Ltd. was voluntarily wound up.[13]

Peter Stewart Saunders and Guy Saunders were ship brokers with their own business. Their father Richard Stewart, an actuary at Plymouth Savings Bank, died in 1926. The Western Morning News report said:

> He entered the banking profession which he devoted his life to, having an outstanding knowledge of all the intricate details of the business. Ultimately, he was appointed actuary of the Plymouth and South Devon Savings Bank, a position he held until the time of his death and which was previously held by his father. Altogether he had been connected with the bank for 59 years and his genial disposition and unfailing courtesy won for him many friends.[14]

[10] *Western Morning News*, 17 August 1927.
[11] *Western Morning News*, 19 August 1927.
[12] *Western Morning News*, 1 September 1933.
[13] *Western Mail*, 6 July 1935.
[14] *Western Morning News*, 2 September 1926.

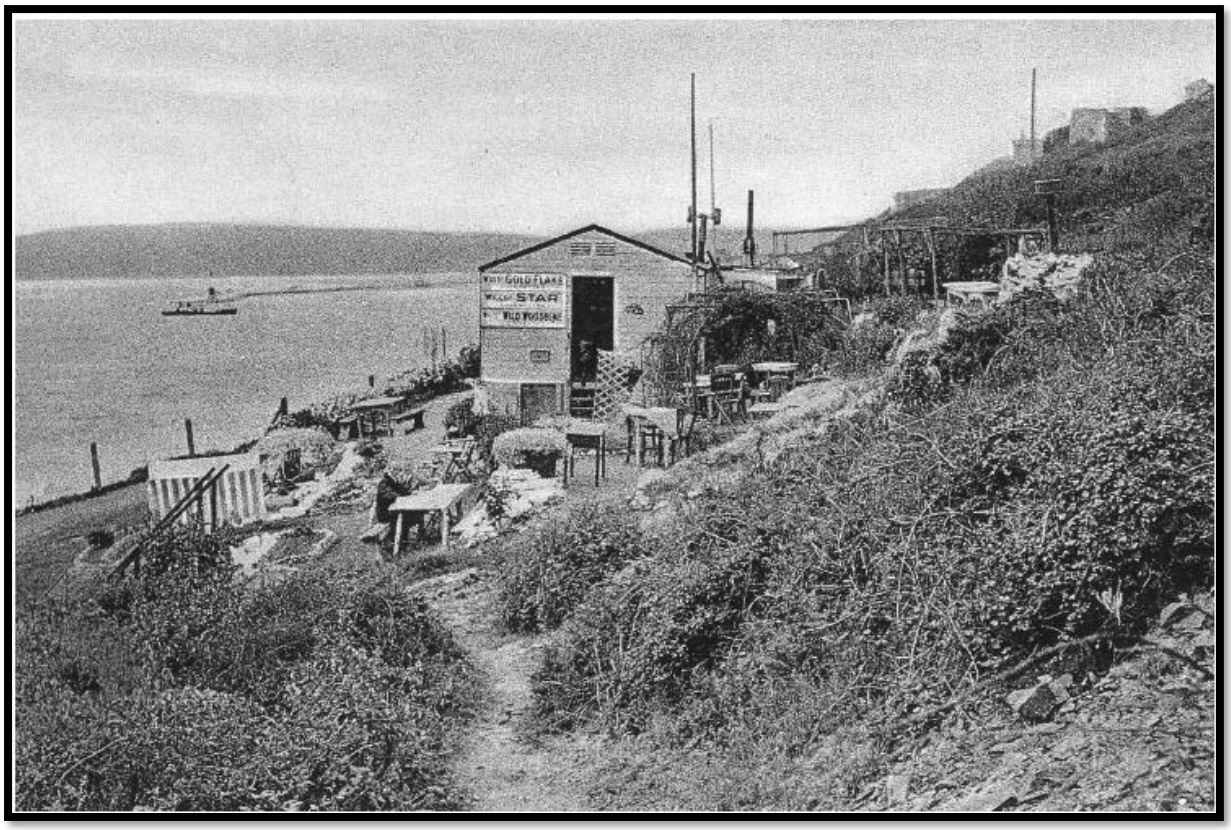

Figure 2: Bovisand Bay, courtesy of Chris Robinson.

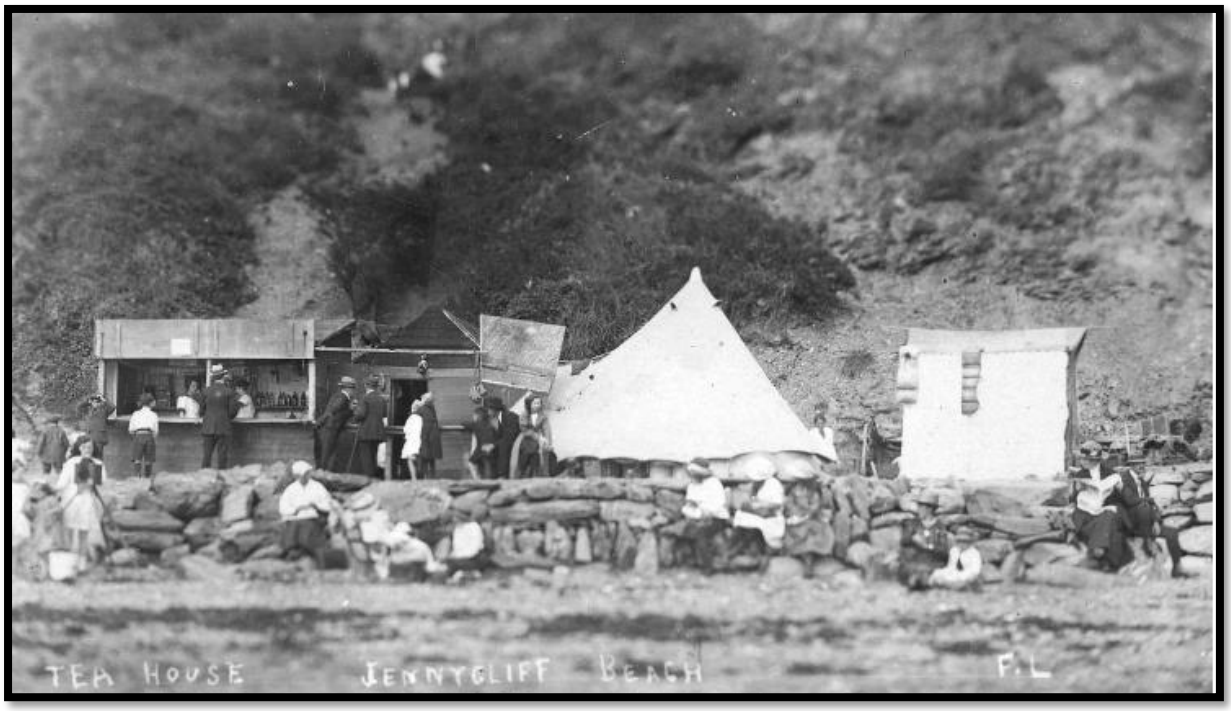

Figure 3: Bovisand tea house, courtesy of Chris Robinson.