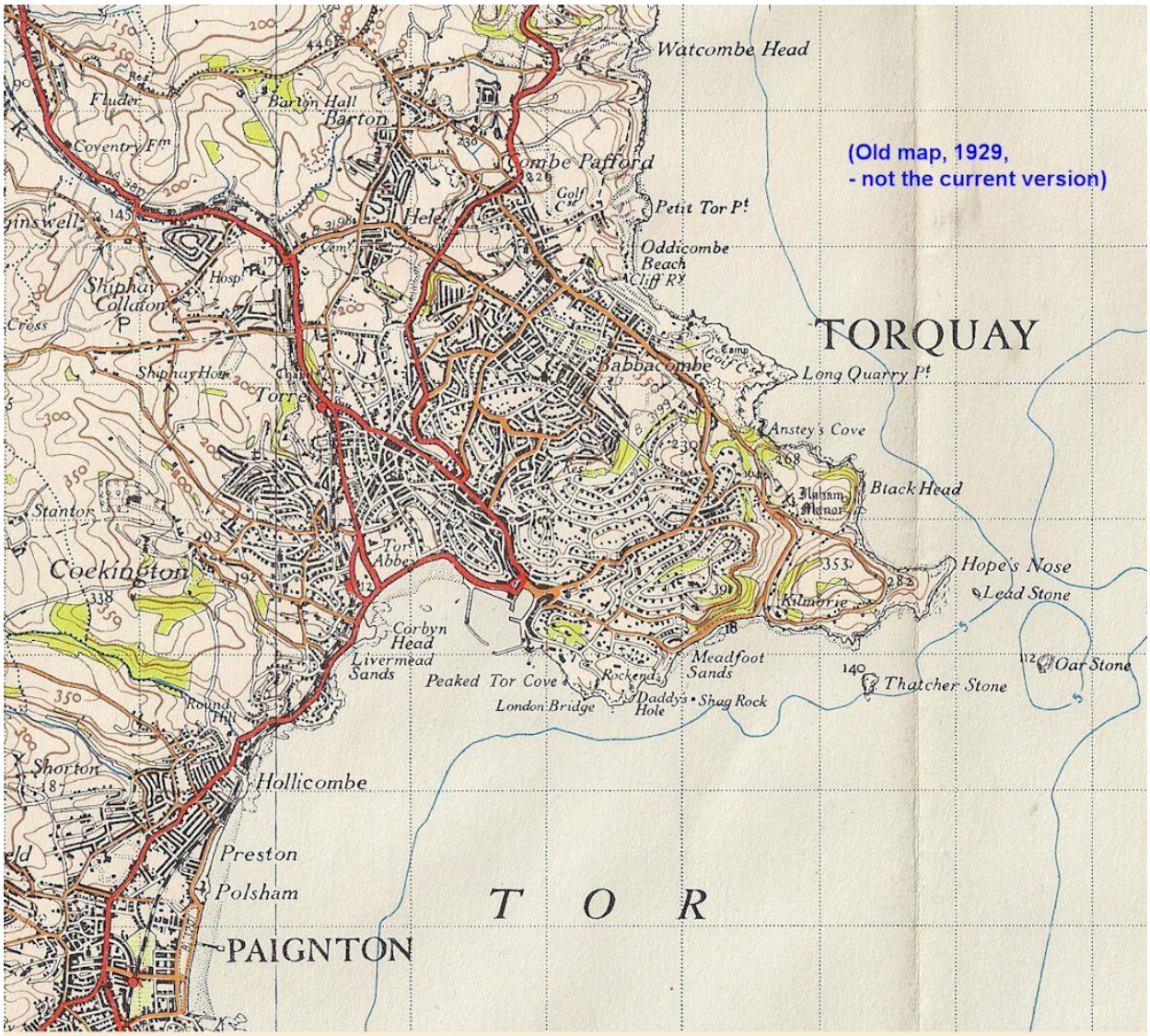
Salus et Facilitas: Tourism in 1920s' Torquay

Dr. Rosalind Leveridge



PART OF THE ONE INCH, ORDNANCE SURVEY MAP OF TORQUAY BASED ON 1929 SURVEY WITH LATER CORRECTIONS IN 1946. Much of the Torquay coastal region had already been urbanised, but housing had only just begun to spread eastward to Kilmorie in the direction of Hope's Nose. "Oar Stone" is now "Ore Stone". "Daddy's Hole" is now "Daddyhole". "Meadfoot Sands" is now "Meadfoot Beach". Ian West, 2010.

Figure 1: Map of Torquay, based on Ordnance Survey 1929[1]

[1] Ian West, 'The Coast Around Torquay', *West Coast Geology*, https://wessexcoastgeology.soton.ac.uk/Torquay.htm [accessed 15 July 2024].

Many Devon resorts that had previously relied on day trippers brought by steamer, train or char-à-banc on high days and holidays had suffered during the First World War, when travel restrictions had severely curtailed the numbers arriving. Ilfracombe, Dawlish, Exmouth, Teignmouth, Lynton and Lynmouth, which had traditionally welcomed visitors in their thousands, were dramatically affected by the cancellation of steamers, the cessation of fairs and other touring entertainments, and the absence of cheap railway fares.

Torquay, however, had continued to maintain its exclusivity, to attract many leisured and wealthy visitors, and to provide entertainment for them. The town boasted many high-class hotels and a fine range of villa accommodation, and had succeeded in providing a rich and cultured programme of attractions for its wartime guests, which included Shakespeare and the D'Oyly Carte opera company. Torquay had always positioned itself as a high-class resort, favouring those who overwintered in villas or hotels there, or came for yachting and the regattas. For many years, the policy had been to positively and consistently discourage day trippers. As Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard have indicated, 'Resorts which drew most of their clientele from the day-tripper market were perceived to exhibit an undesirable and low social tone in the eyes of the social elites of resorts like Torquay.'[2]

Figure 2: Frontispiece, *Torquay Official Guide* (1928)

[2] Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard, *Power and Politics at the Seaside*: *The Development of Devon's Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Exeter University Press, 1999), p. 90.

Guides to Torquay

A good insight into tourism at the time may be gained from the contemporary guides available to visitors, which covered many resorts across the country. One such was the Ward Lock travel guide, with its familiar red cover, priced at a shilling. A promotional leaflet from the company enthused:

> The use of a reliable guidebook doubles the pleasure and interest of a holiday. These well-known books are not dull, dry-as-dust compilations but pleasant travelling companions, readable from cover to cover. Each volume contains the latest Maps and Plans and is lavishly illustrated. In all cases a much wider area is included than the title indicates, and it will be found that nearly every holiday and health resort of importance is described in one or more of the volumes.[3]

The guide for 1923 depicts a resort blessed with much natural beauty and many attractions aimed at pleasing the visitor keen on the outdoors.

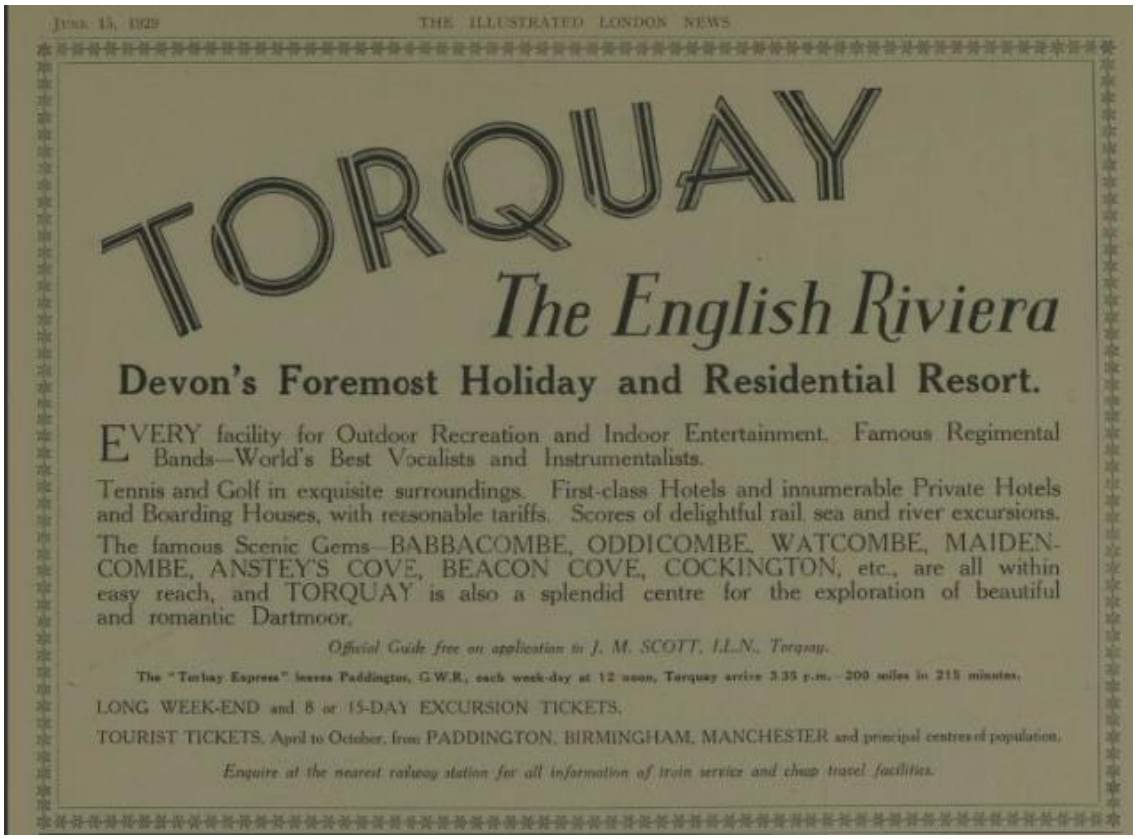


Figure 3: Advertisement for Torquay, The English Riviera[4]

[3] 'About the Red Guides', *Ward Lock & Co's Illustrated Guide Books*, https://wlrg.z33.web.core.windows.net/page/aboutRG.html [accessed 15 July 2024].
[4] *The Illustrated London News*, 15 June 1929, p. 11.

The natural beauty of Torquay and its location on the south coast had long been foregrounded in marketing materials and in the press, who were keen to position the town as a foremost resort of international importance. Favourable comparisons were often drawn between the weather, year-round climate and scenic beauty of Torquay and resorts in Italy and the south of France, such as Sorrento or Menton. The town was often marketed as even being superior in many respects to most other continental resorts, with the added advantage that visitors did not have to travel far to reach it. Moreover, it had class, and was, as the 1923 *Torquay Official Guide* explains, free from the 'cheap and nasty forms of amusement which disfigure so many resorts on the Continent.'[5]

An article in *The Illustrated London News* in 1929 wrote of Torquay:

> … it cannot be too often reiterated that Torquay is a worthy rival of Riviera towns. Torquay's houses are terraced on hillsides like those of Cannes and Monte Carlo … The far-flung crescent of Torbay – forty miles of sapphire sea shimmer between its white cliffs – is as gay with yachts as the Mediterranean littoral.[6]

The Graphic had already made similar comparisons in 1921, illustrating the point with juxtaposed photos of Torquay and Nice.

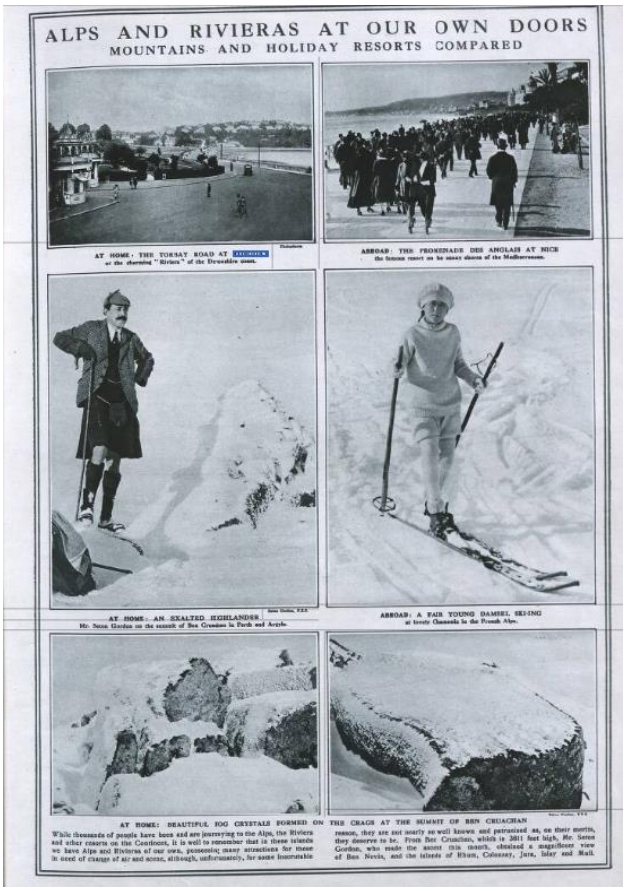


Figure 4: Comparison between Torquay and Nice in *The Graphic*, 1921[7]

[5] *The Ward Lock Guide to Torquay*, 1924, n.p.
[6] *The Illustrated London News*, 15 June 1929, p. 5.
[7] *The Graphic*, 5 February 1921, p. 159.

First and foremost, perhaps, it was the virtues of the Torquay climate that were extolled in the tourist guides. It was hoped to persuade visitors that the resort boasted ideal weather throughout the year for outdoor activities, having mild winters, cool summers and plenty of sunshine:

> The cool breezes from the sea and the moors prevent undue heat and at the same time give a bracing tonic. The average sunshine per annum is 1,820 hours.[8] Sea mists rarely trouble the town, and consequently the air is always clear and dry.[9]

Although in another, somewhat unusual, advertisement, Torquay compares unfavourably to Swedish resorts, it is still placed above all the other British resorts in the sunshine and temperature tables.[10]

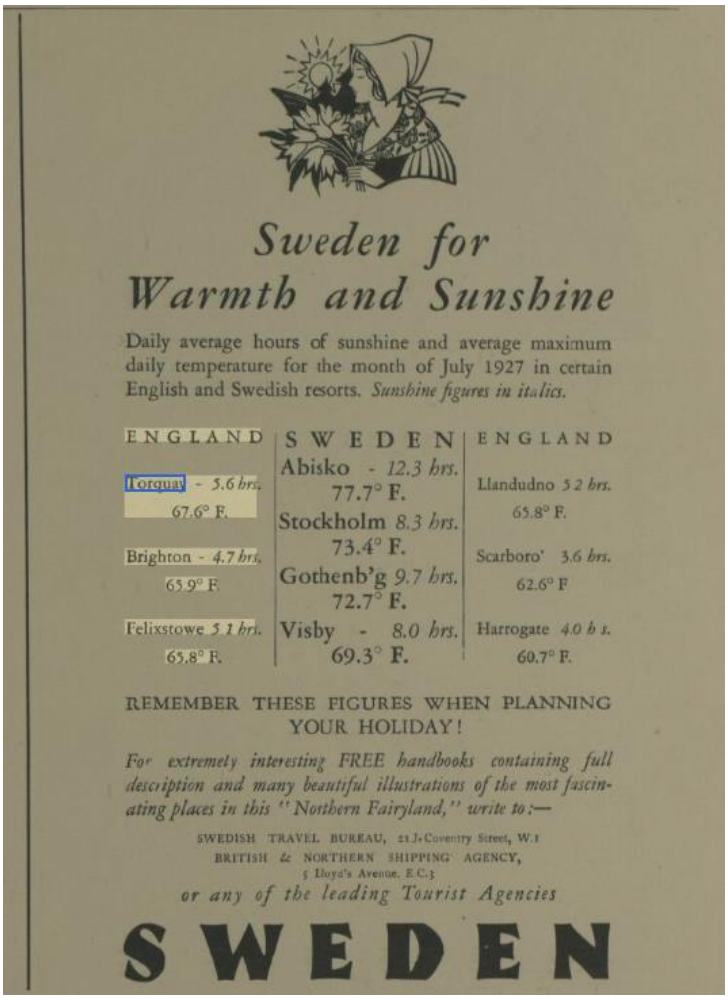


Figure 5: Advertisement for Sweden in *The Illustrated London News*

[8] On average, the total number of sunshine hours annually is currently estimated at 1,545 hours, according to data from *Weather and Climate*, https://weather-and-climate.com/average-monthly-hours-Sunshine,torquay,United-Kingdom [accessed 15 July 2024].

[9] *Torquay Official Guide 1923* (The Torquay Corporation, The Chambre of Commerce, The Hotels, Caterers and Apartment Association), p. 3.

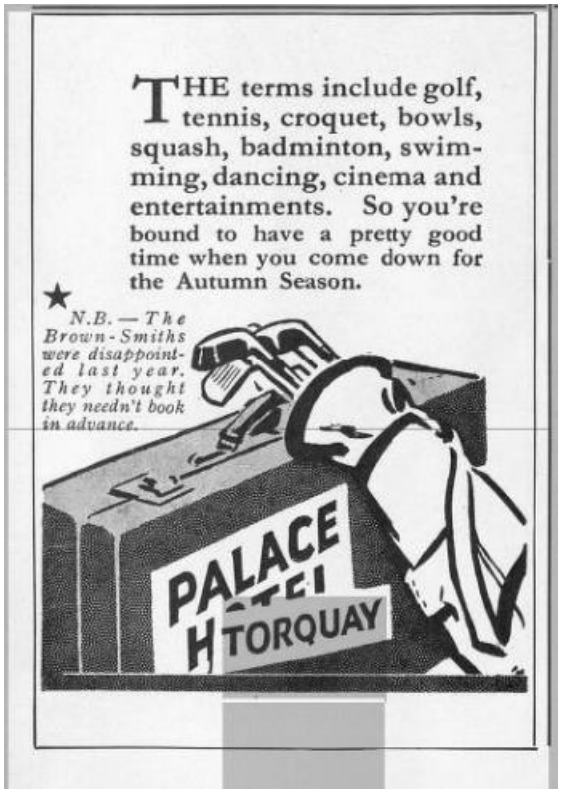
[10] *The Illustrated London News*, 26 May 1928, p. 3.

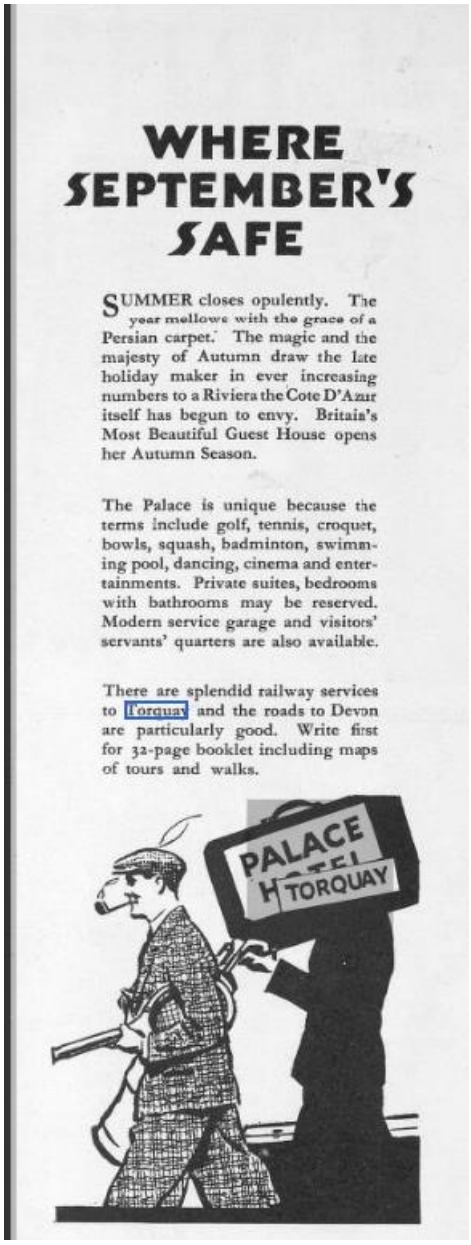
The resort could offer two seasons: a summer one and – as this full-page article in *The Illustrated London News* explains – a winter one too.

Figure 6: Advertisement for winter at the English Riviera[11]

[11] *The Illustrated London News*, 9 November 1929, p. 52.

There were even some hotels that tried for a third season in the autumn.





Figures 7 and 8: Palace hotel advertisements for Torquay in Autumn in *The Sphere*, 1929[12]

A Healthy Climate

In addition to advertisements and articles in the local press – the two local newspapers being the *Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser* and the *Torquay Directory and South Devon Journal* – publicity and features relating to the hotels and attractions that the town offered now appeared regularly in many prominent regional, national or London titles. These

[12] *The Sphere*, 5 October 1929, p. 8 and *The Sphere*, 3 August 1929, p. 6.

included *The Illustrated London News*, *Country Life*, *Motor Owner*, *The Graphic*, *The Tatler*, *The West London Observer*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Herald*, *Bayswater Chronicle*, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, *Reynold's Illustrated News*, *Bromley and West Kent Mercury*, *Yorkshire Post*, *The Bystander*, *The Stage* and *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News.*

Henry Lethbridge states that up to 1919, Torquay had been 'chary of advertising itself' and that it was only with the appointment of a new Baths and Publicity Committee in 1924, coupled with the realisation that the town needed to attract more summer visitors, that attitudes changed.[13] The manager of the Baths, Mr. J. Scott, was an influential figure who helped to shape the image of Torquay as 'Queen of the English Riviera', bringing editors of leading national newspapers to visit the town in May 1924 as well as delegates from an international advertising convention.[14] This perception of the town as select, fashionable and desirable was reflected by the iconic Great Western Railway (GWR) posters of the time.

Figure 9: Advertisement for The Grand Hotel in *The Illustrated Sporting & Dramatic News*[15]

[13] John Henry Lethbridge, *Torquay and Paignton: The Making of a Modern Resort* (Phillimore and Co. Ltd, 2003), p. 160.
[14] John Pike, *Torquay, the Place and the People* (Torquay Centenary Committee, 1992), p. 12.
[15] *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 28 December 1929, p. 1.

The mild climate had always been deemed very satisfactory as a destination for recuperating invalids, for which Torquay had a long-standing reputation. This idea continued into the 1920s:

> Fogs, as such, are practically unknown, although there are occasional sea mists. From this statement it will be gathered that official figures prove that the climate of Torquay is a dry one. And on this account the town is particularly suitable for those who are asthmatical or who are sufferers from acute bronchitis.[16]

Even in extreme circumstances, Torquay had something to offer. The guide continued in a positive vein:

> … it should be remembered that many people come to Torquay under sentence of death from their doctors. They are told that they have only a few months to live and that they may as well go to Torquay and get all the benefit they can from the climate. They come and get better, adding many years to their lives, and often reaching ripe old age.[17]

Statistics relating to rainfall, sunshine hours and even death rates were provided in the press and in the tourist guides to 'prove' the healthiness that came just by being in Torquay. While there was still this traditional appeal to the 'aged and infirm', families were now also included and attractions suitable for children were listed.

What little rain there was apparently fell more frequently at night than in the day, and the bracing air in this 'land of sunshine' was repeatedly linked to notions of health, happiness and well-being. The frontispiece to the 1923 guide gives the town the title of 'Queen of Southern Health and Holiday resorts.'[18]

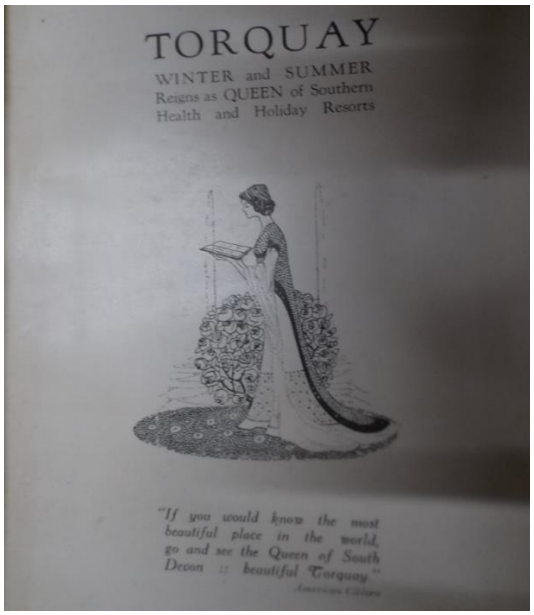


Figure 10: Frontispiece of *Torquay Official Guide*, 1923

[16] *Torquay Official Guide 1923* (The Torquay Corporation, The Chambre of Commerce, The Hotels, Caterers and Apartment Association), p. 6.
[17] Ibid, p. 11.
[18] Ibid.

Leisure and Pleasure

In the 1920s, Torquay boasted 250 acres of beautiful public gardens and pleasure grounds, in which subtropical plants and the ubiquitous palm trees flourished. Just behind the seafront lay the Princess Gardens, close by was the Royal Terrace Garden (known as Rock Walk), and near the railway station lay the King's Garden with its lake and Japanese bridges. Abbey Park was the most recent addition to these, with gardens in various styles, putting greens and tennis courts, a pavilion and a tea house. Torwood Gardens, Babbacombe Combe Downs Gardens and Cary Park all provided places to walk and enjoy fine views. The pleasure grounds of Lincombe Gardens, Warberry Hill Pine Forest, Daddy Hole Plain, Petitor and Corbyn Head offered winding paths and sea air to active visitors. Here, too, Torquay was marketed to its visitors as having an exotic appeal: a lengthy description of the planting in the public spaces emphasises both the extraordinary variety of plants from distant destinations and how well they were growing, further evidence, of course, of Torquay's famed mild climate:

> …the brilliant red Clianthus blooms profusely and Hohera Populena is glorious when in flower… Many varieties of Eucalyptus include a giant which blooms every year with a remarkable girth of trunk. Then there are the Senecios from Mexico; Eringium from Monte Video; Eryobotryas, Paulonias and Clerodendron from Japan; Carpentaria Californica from the Sierra Nevada; Benthamia Fragifera from Nepaul; and Garrya Eliptica from California.[19]

Figure 11: Rock Walk, Torquay[20]

[19] *The Official Guide to Torquay*, 1923, p. 13.
[20] 'Princess Gardens and Royal Terrace Gardens', *Historic England*, https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1001507# [accessed 15 July 2024].

In the 1920s, Torquay was a place where tourists could be very active outdoors, should they choose. There were also many opportunities to spectate a variety of sports and activities, often hosted by well-established clubs and institutions, which all contributed to the genteel ambiance of the town. Cricket, for example, was possible at a number of clubs; the most prestigious being the Torquay Cricket Club, founded in 1818, which hosted many visiting teams including the M.C.C. Torquay's Rowing Club, which was founded in 1869 and had the distinction of achieving many successes in regattas. It kept a large number of boats for hire for tourists, and promised both the novice and the professional secluded creeks and pleasant beaches in which they could row, swim and picnic.

Golfers were well-served with two courses available to them. The best was considered to be the one at St. Marychurch, which boasted a modern clubhouse and 'no public right of way interfering with the course and the player.'[21] Green fees, which the *Guide* termed 'moderate', nevertheless determined a certain degree of exclusivity: 'daily, 3s 6d; weekly, £1; monthly. £2, three months, £4 4s; 5s on Saturday and Sunday.'[22]

Aimed even more at the elite, hunting was available locally with the South Devon Foxhounds, the Haldon Harriers, Dart Vale Harriers, Britannia Beagles, Dartmoor Foxhounds and Otter Hounds, which were all within easy reach of Torquay.

Sailing as an elite sport had long been established in Torquay. The annual regatta, suspended during the war years, had gradually resumed with the new decade.[23] August was the sailing month, and many private craft were attracted to the bay, the Royal Torbay Yacht Club and the Torquay Corinthian Club. Sir Thomas Lipton and his five successive yachts all named *Shamrock*, famous for his attempts at the Americas Cup, drew crowds to the town as he competed in races in Torbay.[24] For the thousands of visitors in 1928 who watched from vantage points across the bay, the huge attraction that year was King George V's yacht *Britannia*, which won the race – an event which was captured on Pathé Newsreel.[25] The presence of *Britannia* evidently enhanced the town's reputation as a refined holiday destination.

[21] *The Official Guide to Torquay*, 1923, p. 38.
[22] Ibid., p. 39.
[23] Ibid., p. 41.
[24] Ibid.
[25] 'The King Wins – "Britannia captures premier honours in Torbay Royal Regatta,"' *British Pathé News* (1928), https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/62961 [accessed 15 July 2024].

Figure 12: Sir Thomas Lipton[26]

Fishing could be undertaken all year round, either from the Princess Pier and the Haldon Pier, or off the coast. The Torquay *Guide* boasted an abundance of mackerel, pollock, dabs, whiting, conger and bass.[27] Freshwater fishing could be found at Tottiford, and the Rivers Teign and Dart also provided opportunities for catching salmon and trout.[28]

Bowls were available in the Princess Gardens, Upton Valley and Cary Park, with the *Guide* assuring its readers: 'The old English pastime has taken a strong hold on the affections of the residents and visitors also appear to find the game very attractive.'[29]

Lawn tennis could be played on new public facilities, with a court costing 1s per hour to hire. Torre Abbey Meadows boasted fourteen grass courts and four hard courts for players. Visitors

[26] Terry Shea, 'Thomas Lipton's Shamrocks', *Hemmings Motor News* (26 March 2024), https://www.hemmings.com/stories/article/thomas-liptons-shamrocks [accessed 15 July 2024].
[27] *The Official Guide to Torquay*, 1923, p. 36.
[28] Ibid.
[29] *The Ward Lock Guide to Torquay*, 1924, n.p.

could enjoy watching a prestigious tennis tournament annually and a Davis cup match was held there in 1924.[30]

To meet the demand for the newly popular trips by motor car, Torquay could offer the Ilsham Marine Drive. Opened in 1924, it was a corniche route that allowed panoramic views across Torbay in one direction and away to the white cliffs of Dorset in the other. Lincombe Drive was a winding drive 'with furze and bracken slopes falling away to the Ilsham Valley'.[31] While staying at Kilmorie, the Drewes' former nanny wrote in her letters of visiting Goodrington and 'a lovely drive to Cockington and back by Babecombe (sic), it was so fresh.'[32] The picturesque village of Cockington, advertised even in 1920s as an 'old world Devon village', or Marldon, a 'snug little village reached through typical Devon lanes', were both only a short drive away.

From the town, a number of excursions were possible either by car, char-à-banc or coach. With prices ranging from 2s to 21s, numerous motor trips took visitors away from Torquay to a wide variety of destinations further afield such as Dartmoor, Exeter, Minehead, Lynton, Ilfracombe, Bude Tintagel and Falmouth.

Figure 13: Frontispiece, *The Official Guide to Torquay*, 1923

[30] 'Abbey Park and Meadows, Torbay.gov.uk, https://www.torbay.gov.uk/leisure-sports-and-community/parks/find-a-park/abbey-park [accessed 15 July 2024]

[31] *The Official Guide to Torquay*, 1923, p. 18.

[32] Letter from Nannie to Mary Drewe, Kilmorie, Torquay, 283au, Castle Drogo Archive.

The perceived delights of sea-bathing featured heavily in Torquay's marketing of itself to visitors. Bathing in Torquay featured in such national publications as *The Graphic* and *The Sphere*.

Figure 14: Front-page photo in *The Sphere*, August 1920[33]

[33] *The Sphere,* 28 August 1920, p. 1.

In his guide to Torquay at the beginning of the decade, J. Burrows is more honest in his appraisal:

> It is absurd to claim that Torquay has bathing facilities equal to those prevailing at places where the beach presents an unbroken stretch of sands extending for miles. The very configuration of the coast prevents that. Such beaches as ARE available here are comparatively short but are well-sheltered, and excellent in all respects for safe and enjoyable bathing.[34]

As a free activity, it had a wider democratic appeal. Each of Torquay's seven principal beaches boasted a special feature or advantage. From the safe paddling, 200 tents, chairs and refreshments at Torre Abbey Sands to the all-day mixed bathing with bathing machines provided at Livermead or Oddicombe, Torquay could provide for deep-water swimmers or families. Nervous holidaymakers could be reassured by the presence of boat patrols, employed by the town to give confidence to bathers.[35] Meadfoot, Oddicombe, Babbacombe, Anstey's Cove, Torre Abbbey and Beacon Cove could mostly be reached by tram and all by boat, and provided cafés with refreshments and deckchairs for hire.[36]

SPORT IN THE WATER

Sea Bathing Proves that Spring is Come

On the Sheltered Coast of South Devon

The exceptional warmth of this year's spring has been particularly noticeable in the West Country. At Torquay sea bathing has already begun, and is drawing youth and beauty to the sands

Figure 15: Advertisement for sea bathing in *The Graphic*, 1927[37]

[34] J. Burrows, ed., *Guide to Torquay*, (London and Cheltenham n.d.), p. 20.
[35] *The Official Guide to Torquay*, 1923, p. 50.
[36] Ibid.
[37] *The Graphic*, 16 April 1927, p. 107.

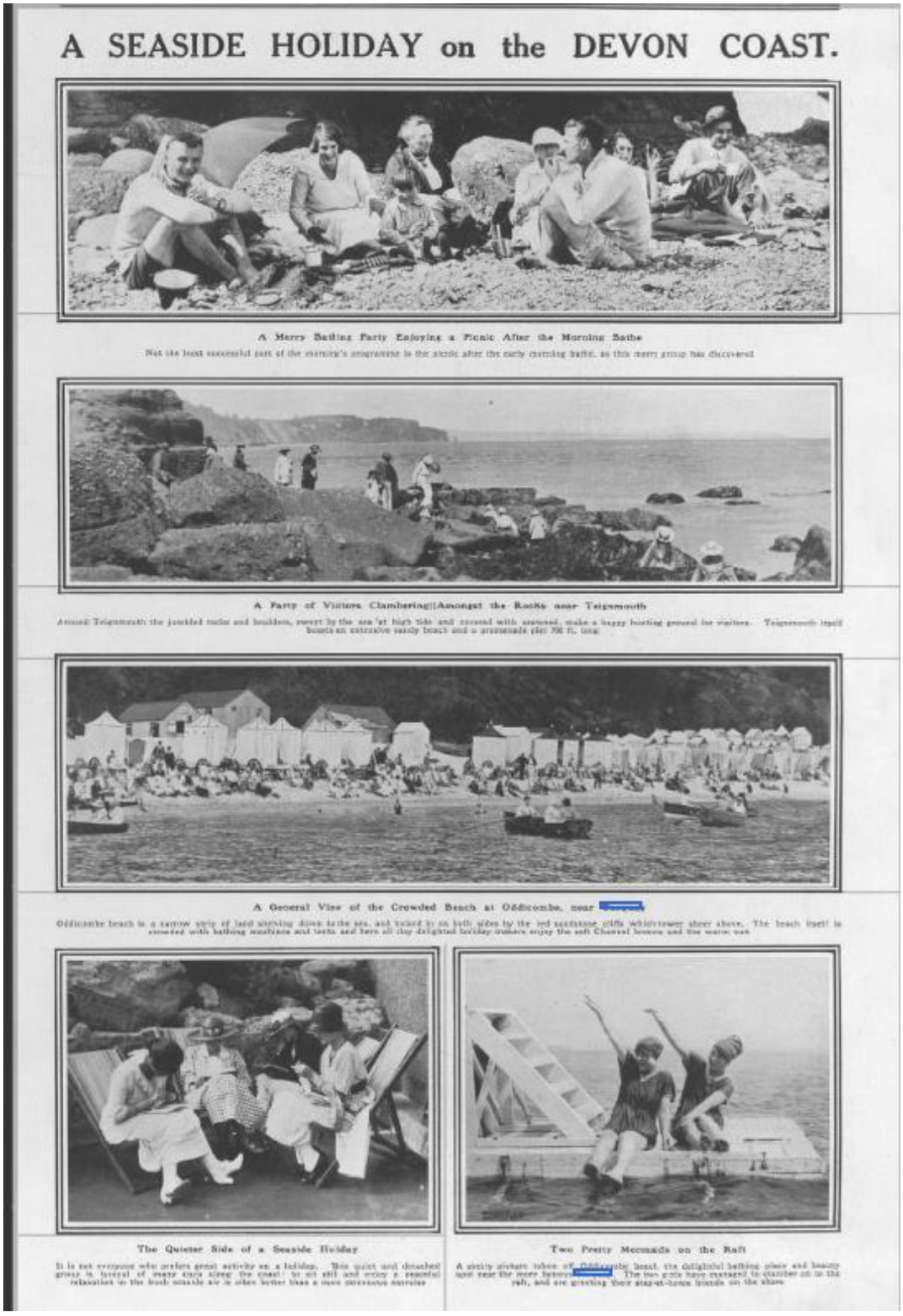


Figure 16: Advertising a seaside holiday on the Devon coast in *The Sphere,* 1920[38]

[38] *The Sphere*, 4 September 1920, p. 23.

Torquay could not fully compete with the authentic spa cities such as Bath, whose natural hot springs filled the new swimming pool built there in Beau Street in 1923.[39] However, it did its best with heated seawater. The Torquay Medical, Turkish and Swimming Baths were thus an important amenity that hotels often featured in their advertisements.[40] The swimming baths, which belonged to the Corporation, meant that Torquay could offer year-round bathing in seawater. A tank measuring 90 × 36 feet was filled daily with fresh seawater and heated to a constant temperature of 82 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter. Although there were some segregated sessions, most offered mixed bathing. There were diving platforms, a water chute, fifty 'dressing boxes' and a spectators' balcony. The *Torquay Guide* enthused: 'The Torquay Hot Sea Water Baths are in great demand as a pleasant tonic and have been proved to be of high curative value in cases of nervous debility.'

Torquay had long portrayed itself as a place to recuperate and recover from illness. As John Bainbridge notes, the Royal Charter of 1892 established the town's motto as '*Salus et Facilitas*, "Health and Happiness"'.[41] In the 1920s, there were as many as sixty different treatments available at the Medical Baths. These included Dartmoor Peat Packs for rheumatoid arthritis, lumbago and sciatica; Torquay Radium Waters, drunk twice daily for general health; and the Torquay Seaweed Bath for muscular problems. Massages could be obtained at a cost of 5s for an hour, seaweed baths for 3s 6d; the price being the same for the rather more dangerous sounding Electric Water Bath.[42]

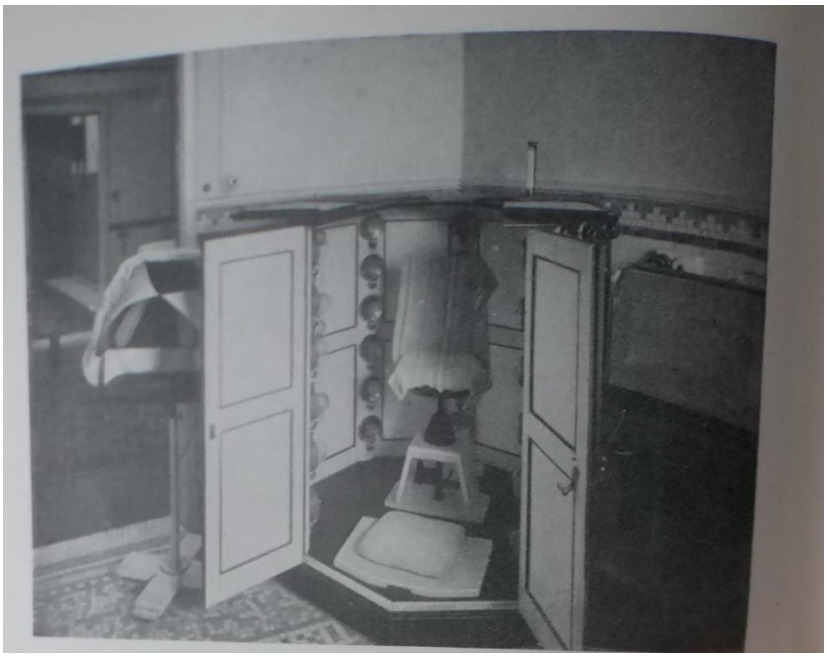


Figure 17: The 'Sun' Cabinet, Medical Baths, Torquay[43]

[39] 'Bath Spa's Heritage', *Visit Bath*, https://visitbath.co.uk/inspire-me/about-bath/history-and-heritage/spa-heritage [accessed 15 July 2024].
[40] *The Official Guide to Torquay,* 1923, p. 43.
[41] John Bainbridge, *Torquay, a History and Celebration* (The Francis Frith Collection, 2005), p. 57.
[42] J. Burrows, ed., *Guide to Torquay*, London and Cheltenham, n.d., p. 18.
[43] *Torquay Official Guide*, 1923.

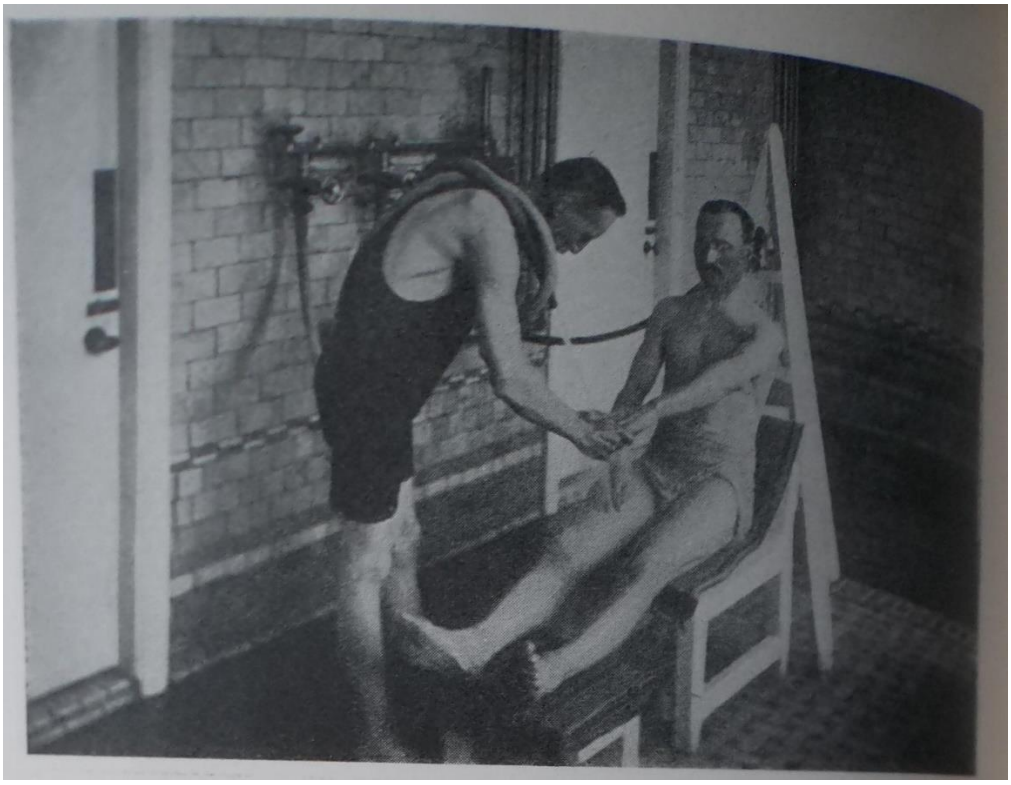
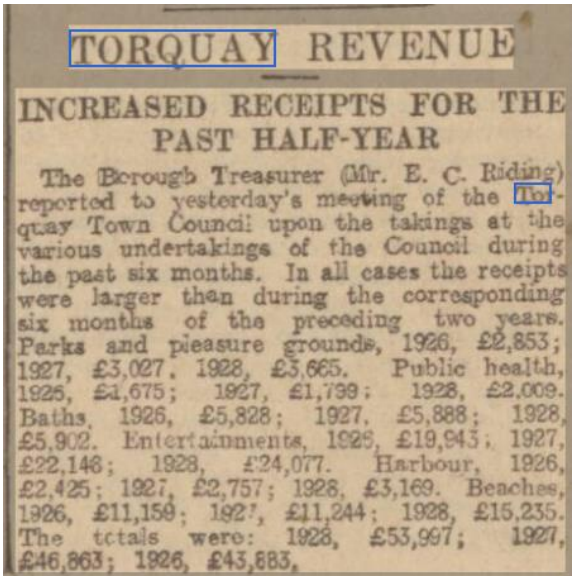


Figure 18: Aix Douche Massage, the Medical Baths, Torquay[44]

Substantial receipts from facilities such as the Medical Baths, which were owned by the council, were testament to a steady growth in tourism in the town. In 1928, the figures showed an increase in every sector for which the town council was responsible, from beaches to entertainments, indicating very successful seasons for the resort.



TORQUAY REVENUE

INCREASED RECEIPTS FOR THE PAST HALF-YEAR

The Borough Treasurer (Mr. E. C. Riding) reported to yesterday's meeting of the Torquay Town Council upon the takings at the various undertakings of the Council during the past six months. In all cases the receipts were larger than during the corresponding six months of the preceding two years. Parks and pleasure grounds, 1926, £2,853; 1927, £3,027; 1928, £3,665. Public health, 1926, £1,675; 1927, £1,799; 1928, £2,009. Baths, 1926, £5,828; 1927, £5,888; 1928, £5,902. Entertainments, 1926, £19,945; 1927, £22,146; 1928, £24,077. Harbour, 1926, £2,425; 1927, £2,757; 1928, £3,169. Beaches, 1926, £11,159; 1927, £11,244; 1928, £15,235. The totals were: 1928, £53,997; 1927, £46,863; 1926, £43,683.

Figure 19: Report on Torquay revenue[45]

[44] Ibid.

[45] *Western Morning News*, 3 October 1928, p. 4.

Hotels and Accommodation

In the previous century, the town of Torquay had expanded rapidly. As Stephen Essex points out, landowners such as the Palk and Cary families, as well as enterprising businessmen, had realised the development potential for land in such a fashionable holiday destination: 'substantial leasehold building plots were made available to the east and west of the resort for the erection of hotels and elegant villas. Their completion…solidified the town's reputation as Devon's "Queen of Watering Places".'[46]

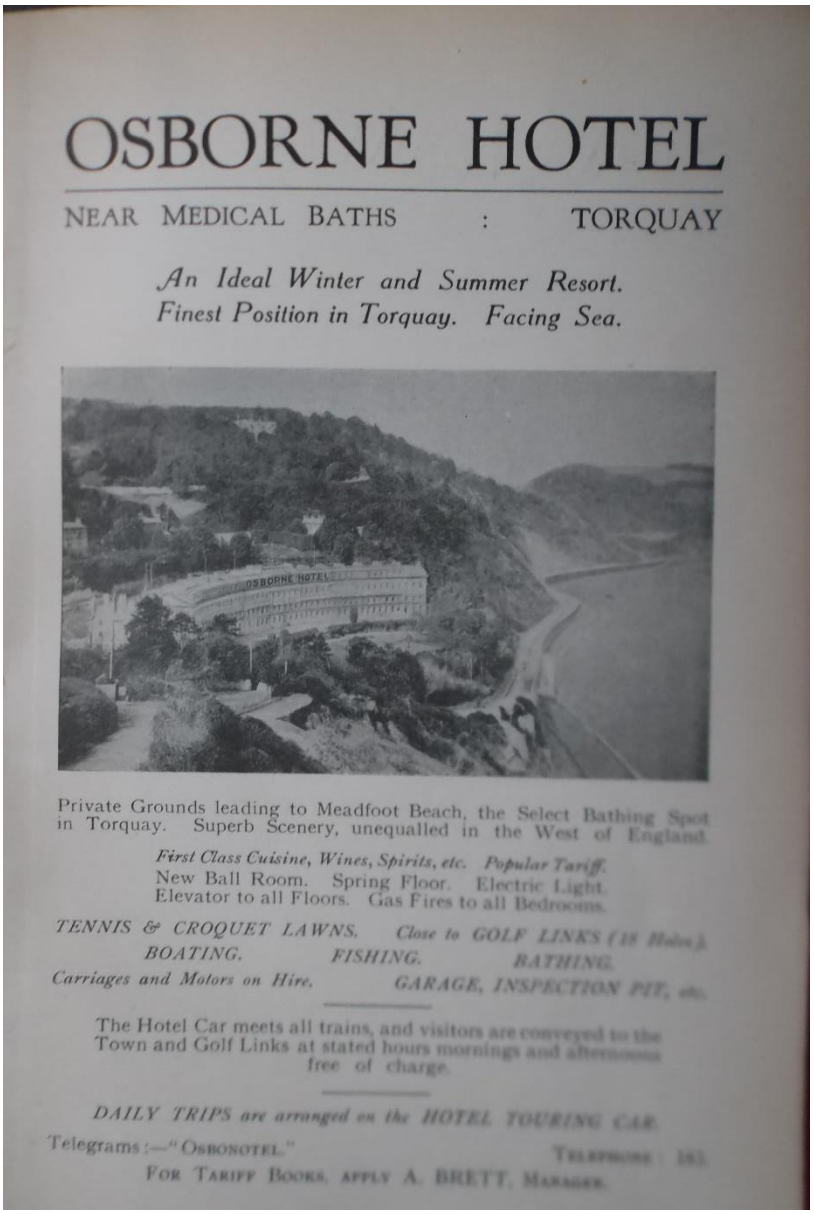


Figure 20: Publicity for the Osborne Hotel[47]

[46] Stephen Essex, 'Devon Tourism: The Story of the County's Economic Leviathan', *The Devonshire Association*, June 2018, p. 9.
[47] *Torquay Official Guide*, 1923.

As Torquay was expanding as a fashionable resort in late Victorian times, new hotels were built to accommodate its visitors. In John Pike's judgement, some of these were 'as luxurious as any in the country … four were purpose-built, the Imperial in 1866, the Torbay and the Victoria and Albert in 1867, and the Grand in 1881.'[48]

Other hotels were formerly private houses; perhaps the most elegant of which was the Osborne Hotel, which had been created from the private residence at 8 Hesketh Crescent, a handsome curve of houses in Regency style commissioned by Sir Lawrence Palk.[49] These five premier historic hotels were joined in August 1921 by the newly opened Palace Hotel, which had previously been privately owned.[50]

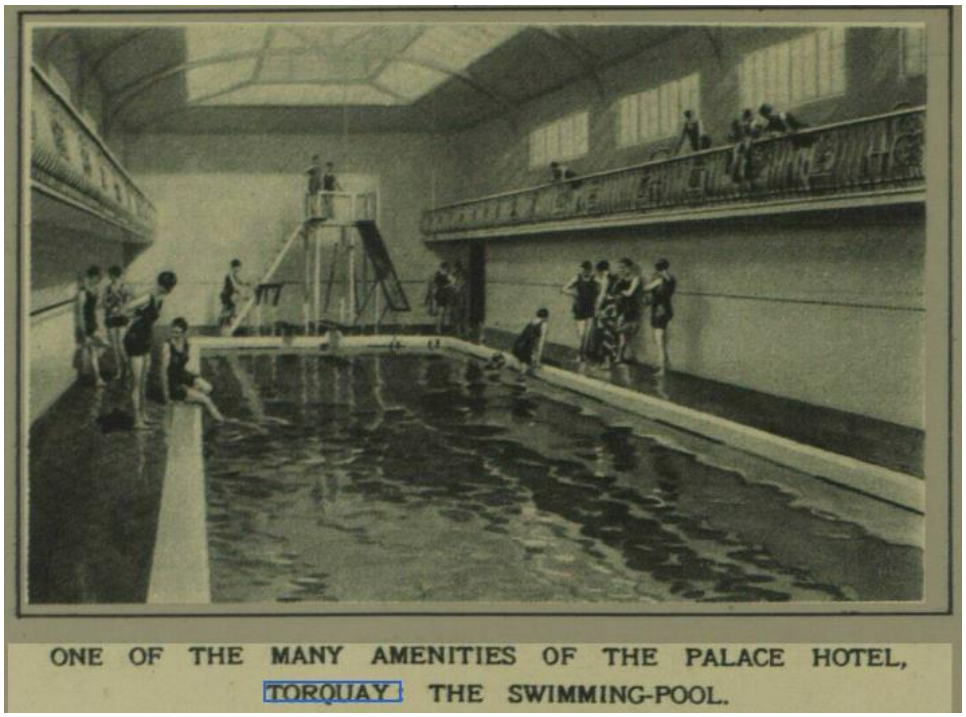


Figure 21: The swimming pool at the Palace Hotel, Torquay, in 1929[51]

The most striking features of these luxury hotels were their scale, style and distinguished clientele. Some thought The Imperial Hotel to be 'the finest hotel in the West of England'. It had been patronised by the 'Victorian celebrity and European royalty', counting figures such as Charles Dickens, Queen Sophie of the Netherlands, Napoleon III, the Prince of Wales and Benjamin Disraeli among its previous guests:

[48] John Pike, *Torquay, the Place and the People* (Torquay Centenary Committee: Torquay, 1992), p. 12.
[49] *History of the Regency Crescent at Meadfoot* (29 October 2015), https://osbornehotel.wordpress.com/2015/10/29/history-of-the-regency-crescent-at-meadfoot [accessed 23 July 2024].
[50] John Pike, *Torquay, the Place and the People* (Torquay Centenary Committee, 1992), p. 13.
[51] *Illustrated London News*, 27 July 1929, p. 38.

> One of the most distinctive characteristics of the resorts'[sic] buildings, gardens and artifacts is the influence of Italianate design. It was consciously imported and reimagined in an effort to create a Mediterranean-style resort in a northern European setting – an English Riviera.[52]

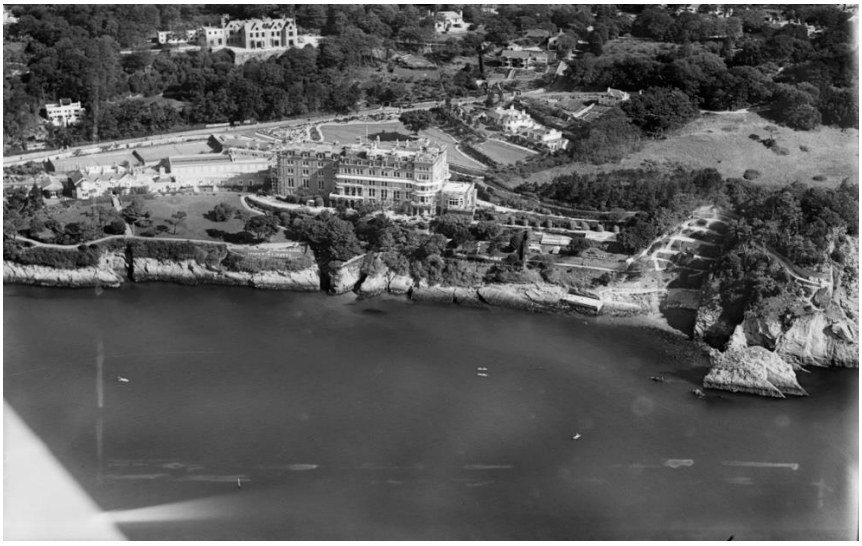


Figure 22: The Imperial Hotel, Torquay, 1934 (Copyright Historic England)

The Drewe family of Castle Drogo always chose the finest hotels for their holidays and were frequent visitors to Torquay. Before buying their home there, Kilmorie, the family rented a villa or stayed in hotels. Frances Drewe, daughter of Julius Drewe, recalled her family visits to the town as a child:

> We used to stay at hotels in Torquay quite a lot. I remember staying at The Grand Hotel and the Belgrave, and at The Imperial Hotel, always having a private sitting room with most of the meals there which we found very dull.[53]

[52] The Imperial Torquay, https://www.imperialhotelexhibition.co.uk/portfolio-1/project-two-zmlyg [accessed 15 July 2024].
[53] Frances Drewe, unpublished memoirs, Castle Drogo collection, p. 24.

Figure 23: The Grand Hotel, Torquay, 1920s[54]

High-class hotels such as these based their appeal to wealthy tourists seeking a luxurious stay on comfort, climate, cuisine, convenience and cachet. The Grand Hotel, with its 200 rooms and garaging for 100 cars, called itself Torquay's 'Leading Hotel'; The Torbay Hotel was 'Torquay's Foremost Hotel'; The Victoria and Albert styled itself as the 'popular leading hotel'; The Imperial claimed to be 'Torquay's Premier and Most Popular Hotel'; while their newer neighbour, The Palace, modestly asserted itself to be 'The Greatest Hotel Triumph of the Age'.[55]

The Palace Hotel was set in 25 acres of gardens, facing Anstey's Cove, and claimed to have 'no equal in this part of the country'. The Imperial boasted a quiet and sheltered location, stood in grounds reaching to the sea. The Torbay Hotel enjoyed a central location close to the Pavilion and advertised itself as the only hotel on the seafront; an advantage to which The Grand also laid claim. Both The Grand and The Victoria and Albert boasted close proximity to the railway station, but it mattered little as hotels had their own motorbus or car that was sent there to meet the trains carrying their guests and chauffeur them around the town during their stay.

[54] Dave Meyer, Torquay in Pictures, *Facebook* https://m.facebook.com/Torquayinpictures/photos/a.596914697027769/1150582858327614/?type=3 [accessed 15 July 2024].
[55] See *Torquay Official Guide*, 1923, for details of hotels.

Figure 24: The Victoria and Albert Hotel, Torquay[56]

Motorised transport also revolutionised the way guests arrived. Some hotels had wisely invested in special facilities that could be used to their advantage when marketing, to cater for those who brought their own vehicles. Thus, the modern Palace Hotel provided a garage for seventy cars. Charles Hore, the foresighted manager at The Imperial, had installed a new motor garage as early as 1912 so that the hotel could become one of the headquarters of the Royal Automobile Club.[57] By the 1920s, he could also boast a chauffeur's workshop, inspection pit, accumulator charging and mechanic in attendance.

[56] A brief history of TLH Leisure Resort, *THL Leisure Resort,* www.tlh.co.uk/about-tlh [accessed 15 July 2024].
[57] 1866 The Imperial Torquay, *Historic Hotels of the World: Then & Now*, www.historichotelsthenandnow.com/imperialtorquay.html [accessed 15 July 2024].

Figure 25: The Palace Hotel, 1920s[58]

Other modern conveniences that still warranted highlighting in the 1920s were hot and cold water in all bedrooms, electric lights, quick lifts to all floors, and central heating – electric radiators or gas fires in all bedrooms – of great importance to the winter visitors. Hotels at this time were attempting to blend the modern with the traditional: many other amenities provided a comfortable continuity with pre-war times. Thus, the newly built Palace Hotel, which described itself as being 'the latest, largest and most up-to-date fully licensed hotel in the English Riviera' had a magnificent ballroom with an orchestra playing twice daily throughout the year, and accommodation for guests' servants.[59] *Thés dansants* and dinner dances were held every week.

[58] '1921 The Palace Hotel', *Historic Hotels of the World: Then & Now*, www.historichotelsthenandnow.com/palacetorquay.html [accessed 15 July 2024].
[59] *Illustrated London News*, 15 June 1929, p. 10.

Figure 26: The Torbay Hotel, Torquay[60]

The Grand and The Imperial also had their own orchestra, while The Torbay claimed the largest ballroom with a 'spring floor'. Lounges, conservatories, and drawing, reading, writing and smoking rooms met every need. The Palace Hotel featured its 'cuisine recherché' [sic] in its marketing, while The Victoria and Albert similarly extolled the virtues of its exclusive menu and wines, and service with 'English staff'. Between them, the hotels offered a wide range of sporting and leisure activities, either onsite or nearby, such as tennis, billiards, croquet, boating, fishing, golf, private bathing, bowls and yachting.

Alongside more traditional advertisements, the Palace Hotel used eye-catching, original marketing material to attract visitors, which demonstrated its modernity.

[60] Dave Meyer, Torquay in Pictures, *Facebook*, https://www.facebook.com/Torquayinpictures/photos/a.596914697027769/760961787289725/?type=3 [accessed 15 July 2024].

Figure 27: The Palace Hotel, Torquay, advertised in *The Sphere*, 1929[61]

A great many more modest hotels and boarding houses came into existence to meet the growing demand. These catered for a wider range of visitors with different requirements, such as shorter stays. The Torquay Hydro Hotel, for example, advertised fifty sea rooms and was within walking distance of the Medical Baths. Mr. and Mrs. Plum's Sea Lawn Hotel was also just one minute from the Medical, Turkish and Swimming Baths and offered 'moderate tariffs'. Roslin Hall, close to the station, trams and town, provided many similar facilities to its grander neighbours, though it could not offer hot water in every room.

Many of these smaller hotels had once been private houses. As Henry Lethbridge observes, this was:

> The great era of the boarding house and hotel in South Devon resorts such as Torquay… Numerous private homes near the sea and sands, detached or semi-detached, were utilised to take in visitors, and a significant proportion of the resident population came to depend on the holiday trade for its livelihood.[62]

[61] *The Sphere*, 13 July 1929, p. 4.
[62] John Henry Lethbridge, *Torquay and Paignton: The Making of a Modern Resort* (Phillimore and Co. Ltd, 2003), p. 161.

The Grove Hotel, for example, which featured in the official guide to Torquay and was well-known in the 1920s, had formerly been a luxurious and ornate villa.[63] Boarding establishments, with names such as St. David's, Annandale, Lancaster and Kilburn Hall, offered many comforts and modern facilities, often in a historic setting, combined with the personal touch and supervision of the resident proprietors.

Transport

Torquay in the 1920s was very well connected to the rest of country and could be readily reached by rail, road and sea. At the beginning of the decade, rail was a very popular means of journeying to the resort. Although two hundred miles from London, fast non-stop trains linked the capital to the town with a journey time of three-and-a-half hours. GWR ran the Torquay and South Devon Express train every weekday at 12 noon from Paddington, with corresponding 'up' trains for the return. Dining cars served luncheon and refreshments. There were also fast trains that connected the resort to South Wales, the Midlands and the North, and from there on to Scotland.

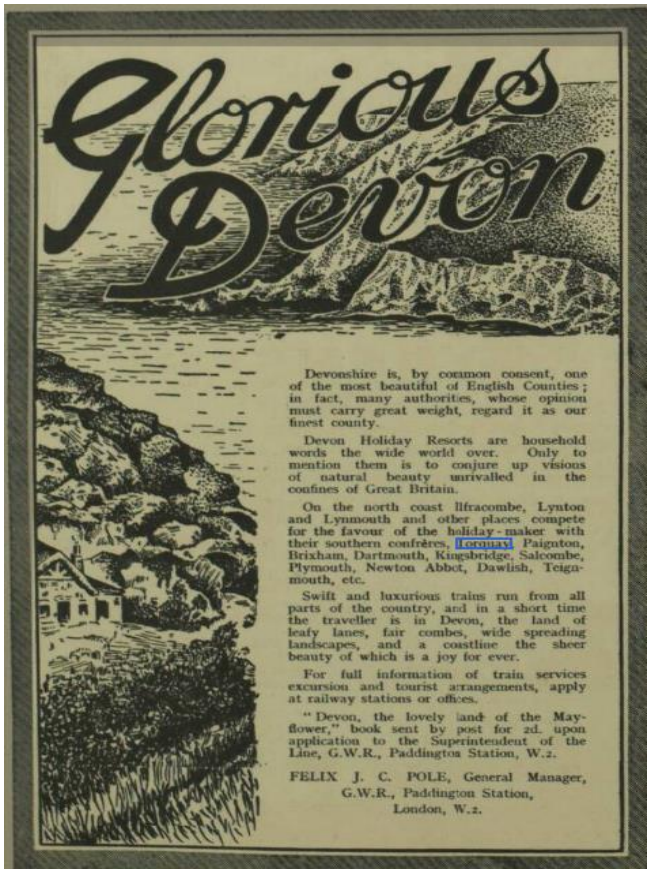


Figure 28: GWR advertisement in *The Illustrated London News*, 1923[64]

[63] 'Torquay in pictures' *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/Torquayinpictures/photos/a.596914697027769/666449700074268/?type=3 [accessed 15 July 2024].
[64] *The Illustrated London News*, 14 July 1923, p. 33.

The GWR also ran its own coach services, which it called 'Land Cruises'. These linked to existing rail services and enabled visitors to tour around more widely and in comfort.

Figure 29: Advertisement for Land Cruises in *The Sphere*, 1928[65]

As the decade progressed, the marked increase in road traffic – motor buses, char-à-bancs and private cars – was bringing huge changes to Torquay. As Stephen Essex notes:

> The advent of motor coaches, as well as the beginning of private car ownership, further enhanced the potential access and attractiveness of Devon as a tourist destination. Fleets of char-à-bancs, open vehicles with a collapsible hood and, later, more comfortable enclosed motor coaches, were acquired by transportation entrepreneurs to take tourists to remoter places on interest within the county with an ease and flexibility unimagined in the horse-drawn era.[66]

[65] *The Sphere*, 12 May 1928, p. 51.
[66] Stephen Essex, 'Devon Tourism: The Story of the County's Economic Leviathan', *The Devonshire Association*, June 2018, p. 11.

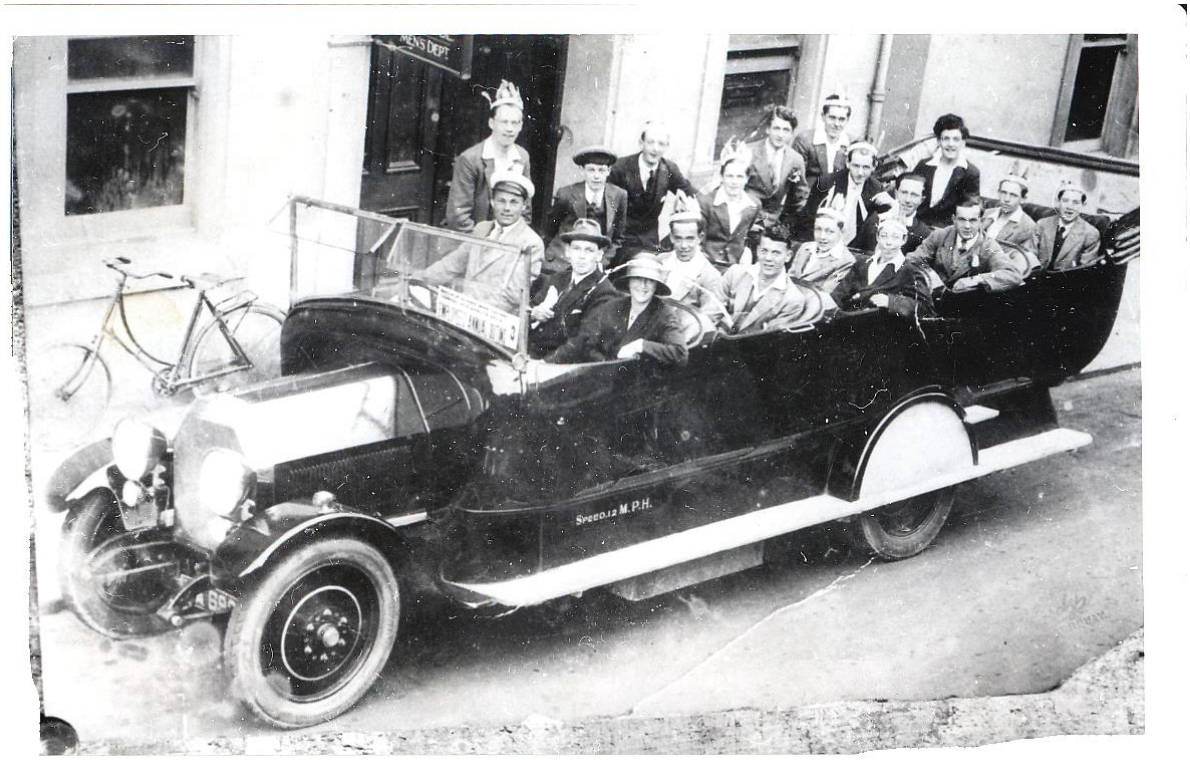


Figure 30: A Char-à-banc in Torquay[67]

Petrol chassis or former First World War army lorries were cheap and available and could be fitted with a char-à-banc body for summer use. Robert Crawley explains that:

> It was not until 1919 that a huge change in mechanical transport took place, not only in Torbay, but following a trend right across the country. It is no surprise that in 1919 there were just four enterprising operators on the road, which in 1920 had shot up to sixteen.[68]

Three of these were local hotels, who kept a vehicle to transport guests to and from the railway station.

[67] Robert Crawley, Westcountry Historic Omnibus and Transport Trust.
[68] Ibid.

Figures 31 and 32: Char-à-bancs in Torquay[69]

[69] Ibid.

Torbay char à banc operators in 1920

Operator	No of vehicles	No of seats
Lamboll & Ingham	1	18
Hutt	4	74
Grist	8	164
Gullick	1	32
Hampton	1	28
Minshull	1	20
Whitwell	1	20
Oliver & Curtis	1	20
Paignton Motors	1	14
Rabbich	1	20
Sanderson	1	20
Milne	1	20
Gully	4	94
Lethbridge	1	14
Gillis	3	70
Torquay & Dartmoor Touring Co	1	28
TOTALS	**31**	**660**

Table 1: The number of char-à-bancs in Torquay in 1920[70]

Gradually during the decade, char-à-bancs became superseded by vehicles that were more coach-like. Robert Crawley believes this change happened in Torquay in 1925, when Fleet Cars (the touring wing of Devon General bus company) heavily invested in more modern vehicles.[71] While some operators continued to use char-à-bancs for a while longer, motor coaches, with their fixed roofs and greater comfort, began to prevail. They were also better built, safer and more reliable. Locally, nearly all operators had coaches of the Lancia make; popular because of their good brakes and comfortable suspension.

[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.

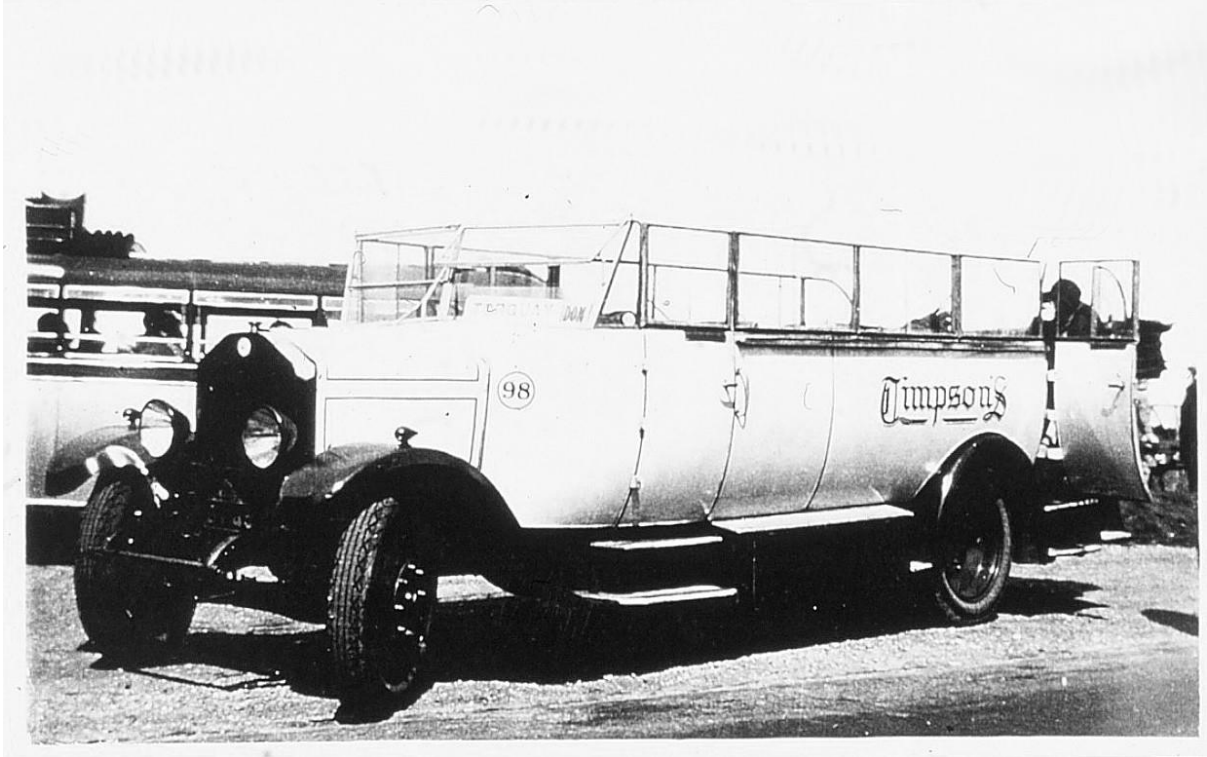


Figure 33: A Timpson's vehicle[72]

Figure 34: Grey Cars, Torquay[73]

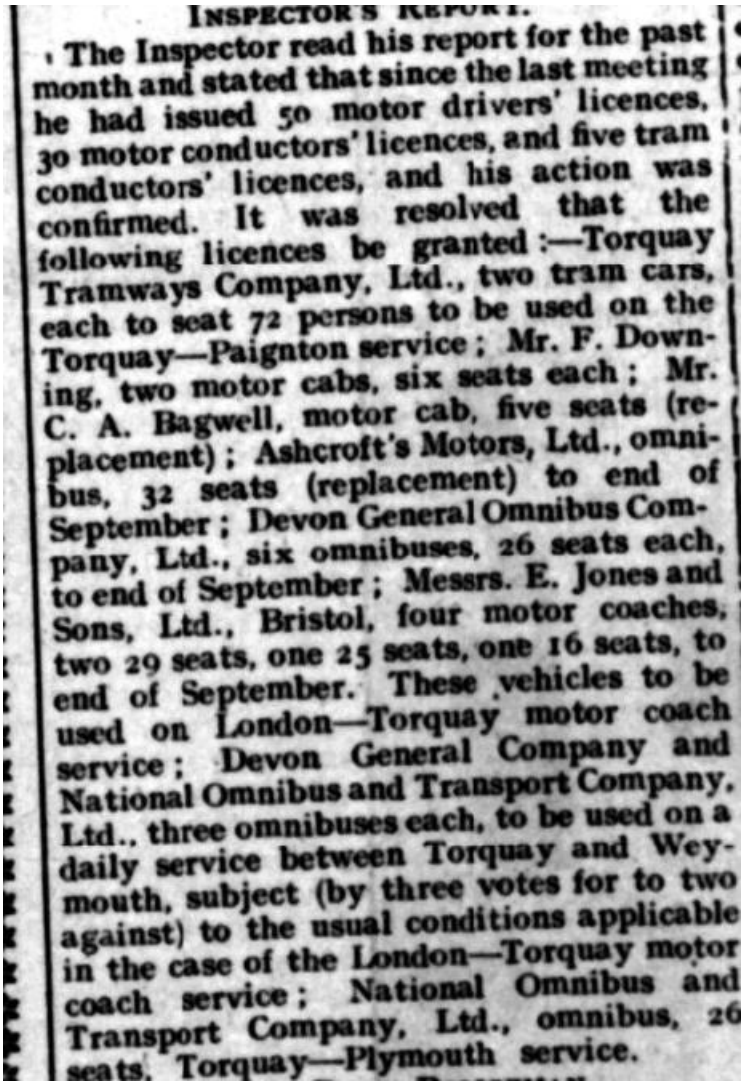
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

Total coach operators in Torbay, 1925–31 (at date shown may have had some char-à-bancs left in service)								
Operator	**Seats**	**1925**	**1926**	**1927**	**1928**	**1929**	**1930**	**1931**
Lamboll & Ingham	36	2						
Hutt	60	3						
Fleet Cars	276	15						
Holman	19		1					
Hutt	20		1					
Lamboll & Ingham	20		1					
Fleet Cars	20		1					
Hampton	20			1				
Green	18			1				
Gullick	36			2				
Hutt	100			5				
Fleet Cars	100			5				
Marks	14			1				
Lamboll & Ingham	24			1				
Oliver & Curtis	14				1			
Lamboll & Ingham	28				2			
Grist	155				6			
Lamboll & Ingham	26					1		
Timpson	36					2		
Timpson	230						10	
Court Garages	60						2	
Lamboll & Ingham	26						1	
Timpson	514							21
Lamboll & Ingham	40							2
TOTALS (88)	**1892**	**20**	**4**	**16**	**9**	**3**	**13**	**23**

Table 2: Coach operators in Torbay, 1925–31[74]

[74] Ibid.

An inspector's report presented to Torquay Town Council in 1928 also demonstrates the importance of motor coaches by this time, and how long-distance routes such as Torquay to Weymouth and Torquay to London were becoming established. [75]



INSPECTOR'S REPORT.

The Inspector read his report for the past month and stated that since the last meeting he had issued 50 motor drivers' licences, 30 motor conductors' licences, and five tram conductors' licences, and his action was confirmed. It was resolved that the following licences be granted:—Torquay Tramways Company, Ltd., two tram cars, each to seat 72 persons to be used on the Torquay—Paignton service; Mr. F. Downing, two motor cabs, six seats each; Mr. C. A. Bagwell, motor cab, five seats (replacement); Ashcroft's Motors, Ltd., omnibus, 32 seats (replacement) to end of September; Devon General Omnibus Company, Ltd., six omnibuses, 26 seats each, to end of September; Messrs. E. Jones and Sons, Ltd., Bristol, four motor coaches, two 29 seats, one 25 seats, one 16 seats, to end of September. These vehicles to be used on London—Torquay motor coach service; Devon General Company and National Omnibus and Transport Company, Ltd., three omnibuses each, to be used on a daily service between Torquay and Weymouth, subject (by three votes for to two against) to the usual conditions applicable in the case of the London—Torquay motor coach service; National Omnibus and Transport Company, Ltd., omnibus, 26 seats, Torquay—Plymouth service.

Figure 35: Inspector's report for Torquay Town Council, 1928[76]

[75] *Torquay Times,* 27 July 1928, p. 4.
[76] Ibid.

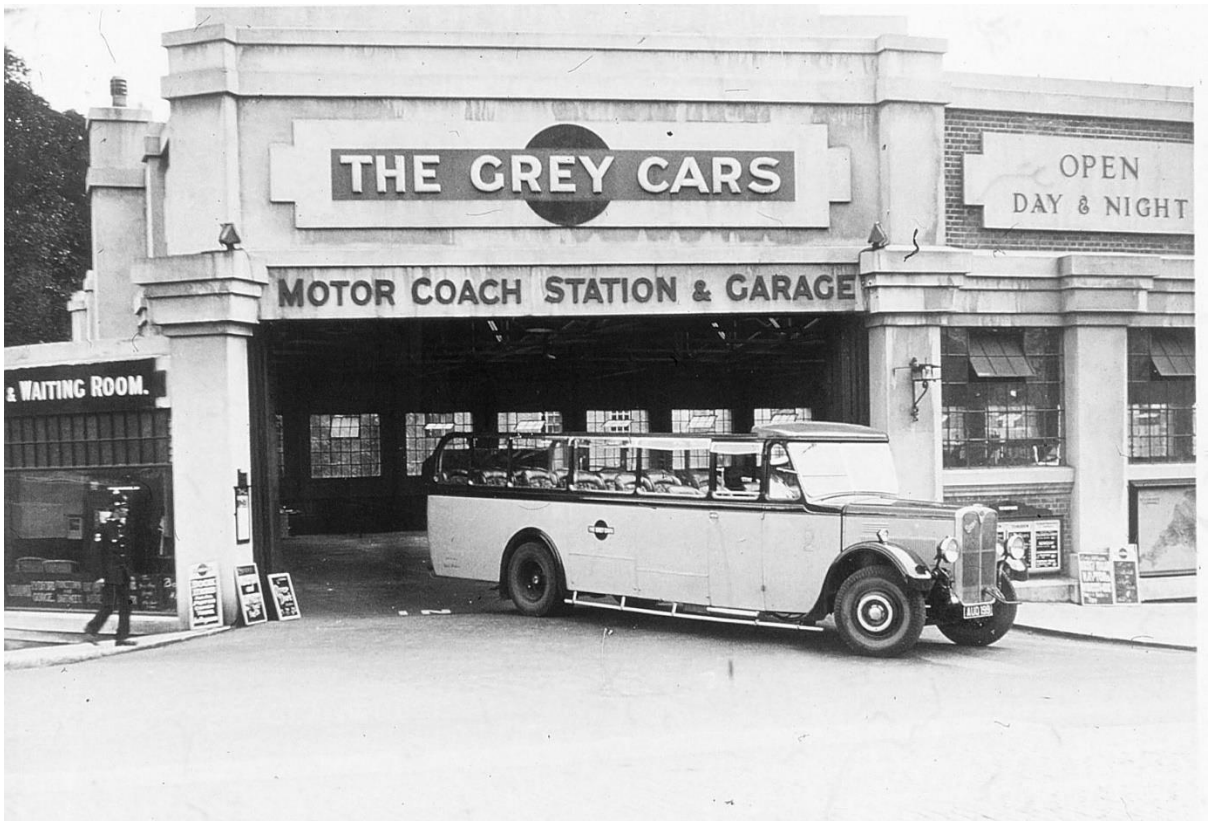


Figure 36: Grey Cars Torquay, Motor Coach Station[77]

This adoption of mechanised public transport in Torquay coincided with a developing trend of private car ownership. As Mara Arts points out:

> One of the features of the British interwar period is the absolute explosion of car ownership that took place and the development of "car culture". The number of private (non-commercial) vehicles on the road increased in particular; from 187,000 private cars in 1920 to 1,523,000 by the outbreak of the Second World War…[78]

A report in the *Torquay Times* in April 1927 termed that particular holiday period, 'a petrol Easter'. There was surprise expressed at the sheer number of cars arriving in Torquay, and admiration for the novel achievement of one visitor, 'who had driven all the way from Yorkshire in just one day.'[79]

By 1929, with the advent of so many tourists to Torquay during holiday seasons, serious problems of congestion and parking arose. Reporting in the local press on the bank holiday weekend in August that year, the *Torquay Times* commented on the 'scores of luxurious vehicles' to be seen on the local streets and the 'exceptional number of private motorists'.[80]

[77] Robert Crawley, Westcountry Historic Omnibus and Transport Trust.
[78] Mara Arts, *Interwar London: Popular Culture in 1920s and 1930s Britain*, https://interwarlondon.com/2021/06/23/25/ [accessed 23 July 2024].
[79] *Torquay Times,* 22 April 1927, p. 2.
[80] *Torquay Times,* 9 August 1929, p. 2.

The garage accommodation was all booked up, and as the report explains, motorists had a problem getting their cars 'housed'.[81] A solution to tackle this problem – to cover over part of the harbour and build a garage for 200 cars – had been detailed the previous month in the same newspaper.[82] The editorial optimistically concluded that with the construction of the underground garage, the problem of parking would be 'settled for many years – perhaps for always.'[83]

Visitor Numbers, Behaviour and That Changeable Holiday Weather

Following the First World War, there was a marked and steady increase in tourism generally, brought about initially as a reaction to years of privation during the war, and later due to the greater democratisation of travel in terms of affordability and accessibility. As Stephen Essex notes, by the 1930s Torquay was welcoming over 150,000 visitors per annum:

> The early twentieth century, especially the interwar years, saw the first manifestations of mass tourism, and even though Devon resorts still attempted to position themselves as genteel and exclusive, the explosion in numbers suggests that holidaymakers of all classes were arriving in the county.[84]

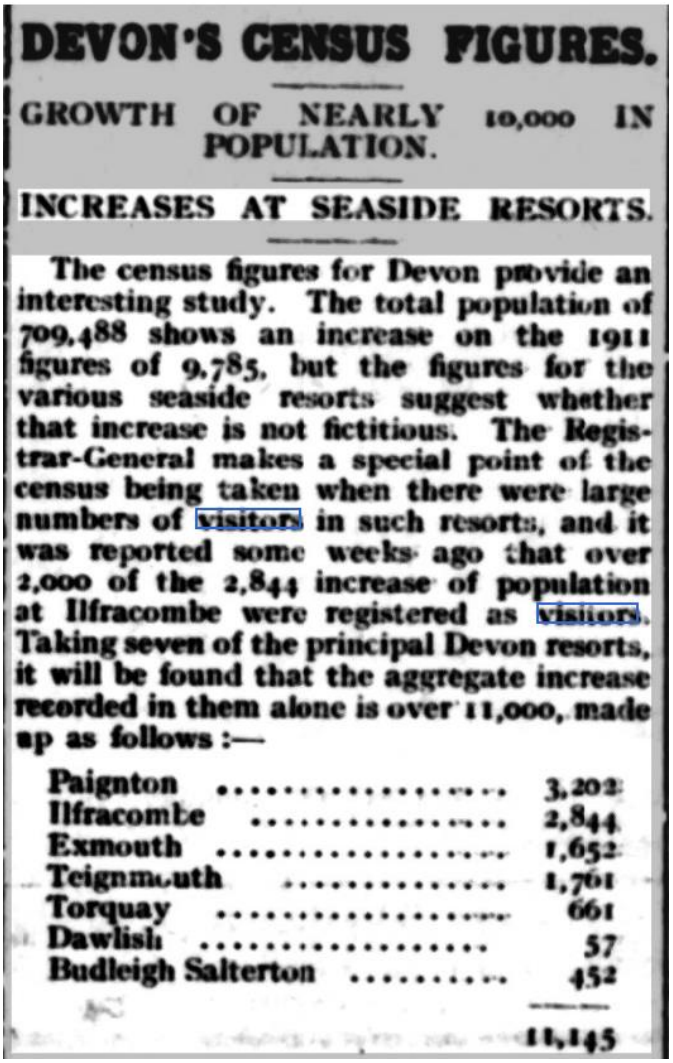
Some estimation of visitor numbers at the start of the decade, at least in Torquay, is possible from the census taken on 19 June 1921. It was found, much to the annoyance of the census takers, that as 'it was an unusually warm and summery weekend, the numbers of people who grabbed the opportunity to escape to the seaside were unexpectedly high.'[85] In the report that followed, it was recognised that in popular holiday resorts, the accuracy of population figures was likely to be affected by an influx of visitors, and that some adjustments had to be made:

> Examination of the data available indicated that the most satisfactory basis of adjustment would be provided by the information given in the second column of the census schedules in which persons not normally resident with the household were asked to describe themselves as visitors, and the numbers so described were, after consideration, adopted as the basis of the measure of inflation. Caution was required in the application of these returns, however, for it was seen that some visitors had escaped recognition through having been scheduled as boarders or otherwise, while in other cases the visitors so described included persons whose residence was within the locality itself or persons who had no permanent residence elsewhere and who would not, therefore, fall to be deducted in the process of adjustment.[86]

[81] *Torquay Times,* 9 August 1929, p. 2.
[82] *Torquay Times,* 5 July 1929, p. 7.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Stephen Essex, 'Devon Tourism: The Story of the County's Economic Leviathan'*, The Devonshire Association*, June 2018, p. 11.
[85] Brian Donovan, 'Seaside Escape or City Break? Discover the Incredible Rise of Tourism in the 1921 Census', *Find My Past*, https://www.findmypast.co.uk/blog/history/rise-of-tourism-1921 [accessed 15 July 2024].
[86] 'Appendix A—Inflation of Populations of Certain Areas.—Census 2021', *A Vision of Britain Through Time*, https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/EW1921GEN/13 [accessed 15 July 2024].

Out of a recorded population of 39,431, it was estimated accordingly that Torquay's visitors made up 14.6%.[87] While Torquay's main rivals along the south coast – Brighton, Bournemouth, Hastings and Eastbourne – all came into the top-ten resorts for having the highest estimated number of visitors, Torquay itself, appears to have had just less than the 6,582 in Weston-Super-Mare, and which was placed tenth.[88]

As the census takers in 1921 observed, June was not the principal time when holidaymakers took their vacations. As previously noted, in Torquay there had long been a winter and summer season, with overwintering or Christmas guests, and a big influx of visitors at Easter, and for the August bank holiday. The census figures were recorded in the press later that year.



DEVON'S CENSUS FIGURES.

GROWTH OF NEARLY 10,000 IN POPULATION.

INCREASES AT SEASIDE RESORTS.

The census figures for Devon provide an interesting study. The total population of 709,488 shows an increase on the 1911 figures of 9,785, but the figures for the various seaside resorts suggest whether that increase is not fictitious. The Registrar-General makes a special point of the census being taken when there were large numbers of visitors in such resorts, and it was reported some weeks ago that over 2,000 of the 2,844 increase of population at Ilfracombe were registered as visitors. Taking seven of the principal Devon resorts, it will be found that the aggregate increase recorded in them alone is over 11,000, made up as follows :—

Paignton	3,202
Ilfracombe	2,844
Exmouth	1,652
Teignmouth	1,761
Torquay	661
Dawlish	57
Budleigh Salterton	452
	11,145

Figure 37: Devon's Census figures[89]

[87] 'Appendix A—Inflation of Populations of Certain Areas—Census 2021', *A Vision of Britain Through Time*, https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/EW1921GEN/13 [accessed 15 July 2024].
[88] Brian Donovan, 'Seaside Escape or City Break? Discover the Incredible Rise of Tourism in the 1921 Census', *Find My Past*, https://www.findmypast.co.uk/blog/history/rise-of-tourism-1921 [accessed 15 July 2024].
[89] *Torquay Times*, 26 August 1921, p. 3.

Visitor numbers, sometimes of dubious accuracy, were frequently reported in the press. Transport figures of numbers of tram journeys made or arrivals by train, for example, were often very precise. Vaguer references simply to 'thousands and thousands' of visitors flocking to the beach and promenade, seem less trustworthy.

In January of that same year, an appeal had been made to the council committee in an editorial in the *Torquay Times*:

> …to keep up a high standard in regard to public services and to make such improvements as would be beneficial to a town which depends almost solely on visitors for its existence and well-being and therefore is compelled to carefully maintain, and if possible develop, every means of attracting patronage.[90]

A letter in the same edition pointed to a slump in visitors, following a flow of 'desirable' ones during the war: 'It is an age of push, and those not pushing are being left behind in the race.'[91] That year, the perennial issue of the cost of the band arose once again, in view of losses faced in previous years. On one hand, it was felt a band was needed to compete with other similar resorts to maintain visitor numbers, while on the other, the £2,400 needed to engage a summer band in 1921 was too much for some councillors who thought a less expensive solution should be found:

> With perhaps an occasional visit from a military band on tour, a few more nights of illumination and possibly more frequent confetti nights and dances, the wishes of all but the most fastidious visitor would be met and at the same time the return should more than meet the outlay.[92]

At a meeting of Torquay hotels and caterers in February 1921, it was felt that the present season had been the quietest for fourteen or fifteen years, and that there was a need to make Torquay more attractive for the next winter season.[93] One suggestion was that many visitors had gone abroad for the first time since the war.[94] Reports of the Torquay Regatta in August 1921 boasted of 'large numbers', but it was not until 1922 that some optimism about visitor figures returned to the pages of the press.[95]

In August 1923, the complaints were not of low visitor numbers, but of high prices, and holidaymakers being turned away due to a lack of provision and a 'big invasion' of guests.[96] It was reported that someone had been offered a hammock for 10s a week, and that 'those who had not made provision beforehand were willing to give fancy prices for the privilege of keeping in the town'.[97]

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[90] *Torquay Times,* 28 January 1921, p. 6.
[91] *Torquay Times,* 28 January 1921, p. 6.
[92] *Torquay Times,* 11 March 1921.
[93] *Torquay Times,* 25 February 1921, p. 5.
[94] *Torquay Times,* 25 February 1921, p. 5.
[95] *Torquay Times,* 26 August 1921, p. 5.
[96] *Torquay Times,* 24 August 1923, p. 9.
[97] *Torquay Times,* 17 August 1923, p. 5.

The inclement weather at Easter in 1925 was thought to have resulted in a reduced number of visitors, considered to be down from 30,000 to 18,000.[98] It had proved to be a busy week across the country – Torquay Council would no doubt have been disappointed to learn that one of its main rivals, Bournemouth, welcomed 34,154 to the pier, a further 8,087 to its Winter Gardens, and that 501,795 passenger journeys were recorded on the trams over the five day period.[99] *The Scotsman*'s reports on resorts across the nation offer an interesting comparison with Torquay at the same period:

> …in Blackpool, every train was packed and all accommodation fully booked; in Aberdeen, brilliant weather attracted some 2,000 or more holiday visitors, some travelling from England; in London, 8,751 visited the British Museum, 9,000 the National Gallery, 40,000 went to Crystal Palace and 64,508 crowded to the zoological gardens.[100]

1,721 passengers were said to have crossed on two steamers from Folkestone to Boulogne.[101] Even the Isle of Man welcomed 3,000 visitors in 'heartsome spring weather'.[102]

The Daily News, in its column 'At the Resorts', offered a snapshot of all the principal south coast destinations that Easter.[103] Here too, the noticeable increase in vehicular traffic is often a cause for comment. A policeman in Brighton was said to remark: 'If any more cars come we shall have to park them on the beach'; in Southend there were long processions of motorists and in Eastbourne there was a 'remarkable stream of vehicular traffic'; in Margate, the motor traffic was said to be 'heavy', although 10,000 visitors arrived by train; and in Torquay, the 'summer-like day' meant 'picnic parties in sequestered coves and the number of visitors beating "all Easter records"'.[104]

There was a gradually growing awareness of the changes that motorised vehicles would bring to tourism in Torquay, both in terms of volume and the type of visitors now arriving:

> The improved facilities for travelling nowadays are responsible for the increased influx of visitors. We are no longer wholly dependent upon the railways for means of transit, and excursion trains are not the only means of conveyance. Motors, motor cycles and motor buses and char-à-bancs have become serious rivals to the railway and carry their quota of holiday makers.[105]

[98] *Torquay Times,* 17 April 1925.
[99] *Portsmouth Evening News*, 16 April 1925, p. 5.
[100] *The Scotsman*, 14 April 1925, p. 4.
[101] *Folkestone, Hythe, Sandgate and Cheriton Herald*, 11 April 1925, p. 9.
[102] *The Scotsman*, 11 April 1925, p. 7.
[103] *The Daily News*, 11 April 1925, p. 7.
[104] *The Daily News*, 11 April 1925, p. 7.
[105] *Torquay Times,* 17 April 1925.

Figure 38: Holiday crowds in Fleet Street, Torquay

In April 1926, there was much excitement at the opening of the cliff railway at Babbacombe, used by 1,000 visitors on the first day and 2,000 on the following day, which was Good Friday.[106] Since the first days of the Easter period that year were gloriously sunny, thousands of people enjoyed the outdoor attractions on offer – playing on the beaches, walking in the gardens, lounging in deckchairs, travelling up the River Dart, or watching the rugby.[107] Once again, there is a sense of surprise at the impact of motor traffic on the town:

> But the most striking feature of the Easter holiday was the enormous numbers who used the road in preference to the rail. Never, perhaps, have so many motor vehicles been seen before in Torquay and the district. There was a continuous strain over the main approach to the Borough on Thursday and again on Good Friday, cars of all characters and size from the aristocratic Rolls Royce down to the humble Ford and Austin Seven…[108]

Attracting more visitors to Babbacombe had the unintended consequences of creating problems with parking. *The Western Morning News,* reporting from the police courts, noted the ever-increasing number of motorists charged with parking offences, particularly on Babbacombe Downs. At one sitting, fines of 10s 6d were imposed by magistrates in August 1927 on several visitors from London who had caused

[106] *Torquay Times,* 9 April 1926, p. 2.
[107] Ibid., p. 11.
[108] Ibid.

obstructions there.[109] Reports of accidents and collisions, and sometimes fatalities, became more and more frequent as the decade progressed.

> That weekend also brought packed trains to the town: on Saturday from London, the Midlands and Manchester carrying those who were staying the weekend; on Easter Monday from Plymouth and Exeter bringing day excursionists to the beaches.[110]

At Easter 1927 it was estimated that 5,000 visitors arrived by train, with another 2,000 on the Thursday and a further 4,000 on Easter Monday. These were considered record numbers. Fine weather prevailed all over the holiday period. While the longer-stay visitors were said to have come from London and all over the country, it was now acknowledged that 'day trippers' were in plentiful supply on Easter Monday, who flocked to the beaches and lounged in deckchairs, enjoying the band and the sunshine.[111]

Figure 39: New Band Shelter in Princess Gardens[112]

[109] *Western Morning News*, 30 August 1927, p. 3.
[110] Ibid.
[111] *Torquay Times,* 27 July 1928, p. 4.
[112] *Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser Christmas Number 1925–30* (1928), p. 52.

Many preparations were made in August 1929, ahead of the anticipated holiday rush. 400 excursion trains had been laid on and an extra 120 relief trains were organised.[113] Hundreds of day-and-a-half-day trips, combining rail, road, river and sea options, were available, and the GWR was running cheap day trips to many localities.[114]

Figure 40: Holiday traffic in Torquay[115]

By the end of the decade, while there was greater acceptance of the use of motor car, there was also a recognition that this had created a third type of holiday guest. In addition to the visitor whose winter or summer stay lasted weeks or even months, and the often maligned or unwanted 'day-tripper' who had only hours to spend, could now be added the 'short-stay visitor', who with their own private cars could move around from location to location:

> With the advent of the cheaper car, has come a complete change in holiday conditions. Nowadays many holiday-makers tour from place to place in their car and instead of booking accommodation at a hotel or boarding establishment for two or three weeks, they now require only a "bed and breakfast" or accommodation for two or three days at the most.[116]

The weather on the final August bank holiday weekend of the 1920s was unpredictable, with alternating rain and sunshine, which sent the crowds away from the beaches and into the indoor entertainments, only to return again later.[117] Predictable by now, however, were the

[113] *Torquay Times,* 2 August 1929, p. 7.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Robert Crawley, Westcountry Historic Omnibus and Transport Trust.
[116] *Torquay Times,* 2 August 1929, p. 7.
[117] Ibid, p. 2.

hundreds of vehicles of all types that filled the streets of Torquay: trams took hundreds of holidaymakers to their accommodation and to Babbacombe; char-à-bancs and motor coaches carried visitors to the moors and beauty spots; garage accommodation was quickly booked up and there was some surprise expressed at the need to park cars in the side streets. Visitor numbers were estimated at 20,000, and for this, the last summer of the 1920s, the popularity and success of Torquay as a resort appeared assured:

> The annual invasion of Bank Holiday had begun. Sunday morning saw the usual sight of literally thousands of holiday-makers wending their way on foot and by trams to their objective which was Babbacombe Downs and Babbacombe beach. Ocular demonstration of the popularity of these places was evidenced by the sight presented during the day. Every available chair was occupied by people who just seemed to want nothing else than to lie in them and absorb the beauty of the surrounding unrivalled scenery. Conversation was unnecessary. Mother Nature was all sufficient in herself.[118]

The greater number of arrivals provoked concern in some quarters that the traditional class of visitor to the town – the leisured and wealthy – now seemed outnumbered by a new class of holidaymaker. Comments in the press sometimes sought to be reassuring, such as the report on attractions in Torquay in April 1926, which asserted that there had never been 'so many visitors of a solid, substantial middle-class nature.'[119]

The debate over whether a resort was 'losing its tone' was by no means confined to Torquay. A local doctor in Harrogate feared the town was changing for the worse, blaming it on the arrival of cars, buses and charabancs bringing 'the Tripper, the exuberant, beretted, postcard-buying tripper.'[120] In 1929, a vicar in Paignton went further, challenging the existence of 'sinful pictures' on the pier, explaining 'he did not wish Paignton to be "Blackpoolised" or become the resort of the dregs of Europe!'[121] In the same year, an editorial in the *Torquay Times*, mused over the town's visitors, past and present, and the future direction of Torquay. 'Watchman' points to the futility of residents continuing to favour winter over summer visitors:

> This class are the people mostly who remember the days when all the Villas were filled with well-to-do, and even rich, aristocratic families, when there were no boarding houses or private hotels, no trams, buses, trippers amusements or games, and when money was plentifully spent in the Strand and Fleet St. stores, in the upkeep of big, domestic establishments. They sigh for a large measure of return to those halcyon days and buoy themselves up to believe that if less money was spent in attracting the summer type of visitors, and more upon attracting the winter type, it would be better in every way for Torquay.[122]

Writing at the end of the decade, Watchman notes the changes that have already occurred. He advises his readers to accept them and to look to the future in forthright and prescient comments in which he concludes that 'these days will never return':

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[118] Ibid.
[119] *Torquay Times,* 9 April 1926, p. 7.
[120] *Leeds Mercury*, 21 August 1929, p. 5.
[121] *Torquay Times,* 23 August 1929, p. 10.
[122] *Torquay Times,* 23 August 1929, p. 4.

> Neither in Torquay, nor elsewhere, will even the wealthy buy, build, or rent large houses necessitating domestic staffs of ten or twenty strong. It will not be done, because owing to the lack of domestic servants, it cannot be done. The class of people who once occupied Torquay's most important villas now find what they need with much less trouble, and a cheaper and better service in the large hotels; and Torquay will continue to get its share, as it does, of this type of people in the new form of visitation which they have been compelled by changed circumstances to adopt.[123]

Torquay entered the 1920s with its reputation as a resort of class and gentility still enduring. Although during the First World War, numbers of visitors were limited, elite travel had continued and some hotels had managed to survive the difficult years. With the beginning of the new decade, technological developments in transport drove changes nationally, which were reflected in events and practices locally in Torquay. The mechanisation of vehicles was an unstoppable force that transformed the way visitors arrived in the town and departed from it again into the surrounding towns and countryside on excursions and outings. While the train continued to be a popular and significant means of linking tourists with destinations, the ability to be met at the station by char-à-banc or taken on further by coach, was novel.

For Keith Laybourn, the most influential factor in the rise of travel during this period, was the car:

> The 1920s became the new age of the car. There were around 300,000 motorised vehicles in Britain in 1920 and this number had increased sixfold by 1929. Competing with other slower occupiers of the road – horse-driven vehicles, trams and pedestrians, "who held the right of saunter" – motorised vehicles rapidly drove other road users off the road.[124]

The rise of the car allowed individuality and flexibility when it came to destinations and duration of stays, and touring holidays became possible. This in turn led to a change in the nature of the tourists coming to Torquay, some of whom wanted only short-stay bed and breakfast accommodation, in contrast to the town's traditional visitors who had favoured longer stays with full board in one of the town's well-established hotels.

The 1920s were demonstrably a decade of change for Torquay; a time when the ever-greater visitor numbers – at once both much desired and greatly feared – brought both prosperity and problems. Congestion on the streets of Torquay was an almost immediate consequence of private vehicle ownership; much debate was had in the town council about identifying visitor needs such as buildings and bands, and funding them; accommodation needed to adapt to changing needs of the tourist; and concerns were frequently voiced about the type of visitor now attracted to Torquay and how the character of the place long known as the 'Queen of the English Riviera' might be forever altered. For a town that had fiercely guarded its elite reputation for many years, the challenges of modern mass tourism had begun to become apparent. Yet, as Torquay moved into a new decade, an air of optimism prevailed as the summer season was keenly anticipated once again:

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[123] *Torquay Times,* 23 August 1929, p. 4.

[124] Keith Laybourn, 'Twenties' Britain (part two)', *The National Archives,* www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/twenties-britain-part-two [accessed 23 July 2024].

> Easter defies despondency. Torquay, although she has seemed dull during the last few months, has awakened from her winter sleep, and once more enjoys the startling popularity to which her beauty and her climate entitles her.[125]

The Victoria and Albert Hotel in July 1929 advertised the town amusingly and succinctly: 'Don't see Naples and die, but visit Torquay and live – in ecstasy.'[126]

Figure 41: An artist's impression of Torquay from Waldon Hill[127]

[125] *Torquay Times,* 25 April 1930, p. 8.
[126] *Sheffield Independent*, 26 July 1929, p. 3.
[127] *Torquay Official Guide*, 1923.