

LOCAL STUDIES EDUCATION SERIES

# PAIGNTON



Paignton Esplanade about 1896

## The Town of Golden Sands

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Paignton about 1880

At the beginning of the 19th century, Paignton was famed for growing cabbages and the inhabitants were cruelly nicknamed 'Flat-polls' after a well-known local variety. In 1801, the population of the town numbered 1,575, almost double that of Torquay, but whilst their neighbour quickly provided amenities to change from a fishing hamlet into a popular seaside resort, Paignton did not follow suit until after the arrival of the railroad in 1859. The development of the seafront got underway in 1867 when landowner, Mr MacLean, made a gift of Polsham Green to the town. In return, he was assured that sea-defences would be put in place to prevent high tides from flooding the area.

This move was the key to Paignton's success. Local architect George Soudon Bridgman was engaged to design the sea wall along Paignton Beach. The grounds of The Green were then laid out for holidaymakers - mingling with sheep which enjoyed grazing rights until

1908. Mr McLean sold other land for development. Soon, handsome villas and terraces of houses sprang up as more and more people wanted to make their home in the town. George Soudon Bridgman continued to play an important role and among his achievements was the building of Oldway Mansion and Paignton Pier. For his outstanding contribution to the development of the town he became known as 'The Father of Paignton'.

By 1891, the population topped the 6,000 mark. Marshland at Preston and Goodrington had been transformed into pleasure grounds and beaches which were the envy of many other seaside towns. Cabbage patches were a thing of the past as Paignton emerged as a holiday resort labelled 'The Town of Golden Sands'.

## ARTHUR HYDE DENDY (1821 - 1886)

'Every watering place has its own special features and Paignton has its own too. Here you will find no rollicking horseplay and boisterous fun such as you may have been accustomed to on Ramsgate Pier or Margate Sands . Paignton prefers to be select, dignified and discreet; and yet there are not wanting abundant means of enjoyment'.

This description of Paignton appeared in a holiday guide produced in 1885 by leading businessman Arthur Hyde Dendy. The provision of facilities for residents and visitors in the resort owed much to his foresight and dynamic personality. Born in London, Dendy made his fortune as a lawyer in Birmingham before setting up several enterprises in Paignton. He published the local newspaper, bought the

Esplanade Hotel, then built the Gerston Hotel - complete with its own Royal Bijou Theatre. Mobile beach huts called Bathing Machines could be hired from his company, and in 1872 he introduced the first horse-drawn bus service to carry passengers between Paignton and Torquay. Paignton Pier was financed by him as a tourist attraction in 1878 and he operated boat trips across the Bay from the new structure. A sports ground for archery, cycling and rugby opened at the rear of his Esplanade Hotel in 1883.

His investment in these projects did much to promote the image of the town but did not reap huge profits during his lifetime. Although his uncle had made a considerable amount of money in Torquay, Dendy spurned the opportunity to join him as he was not impressed by Paignton's rival on the 'English Riviera', joking that "Torquay was built for Paignton to look at'.



Paignton Pier

# PAIGNTON - NINETEENTH CENTURY MILESTONES

- 1800 A Naval Hospital is built at Goodrington to care for casualties of the Napoleonic Wars. The memorial stone of Major Thomas Hill, killed in 1815, is a reminder of the 300 war dead said to be buried nearby.
- 1838 To encourage shipping trade, plans are approved to develop Paignton Harbour.
- 1856 Redcliffe Towers is built for an eccentric retired army officer, Colonel Robert Smith. Locals call it 'Smith's Folly'.
- 1859 Fights break out when a crowd of 18,000 clamour for a portion of the one and a half ton "Paignton Pudding" baked to celebrate the arrival of the railroad.
- 1873 Oldway Mansion is built for wealthy American Isaac Singer. Extensive alterations to the building are carried out by his son Paris in 1907. (see Local Studies Education Series 'Isaac Singer - Inventor of the Singer Sewing Machine')
- 1879 The world premier of Gilbert & Sullivan's 'Pirates of Penzance' is performed at the Royal Bijou Theatre by the D'Oyly Carte Operatic Company.
- 1886 Only seven households subscribe to the town's first telephone service.
- 1887 The development of Victoria Street coincides with Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee (a celebration of her 50 year reign).
- 1899 Thomas Adams introduces a steam-driven vehicle to replace horse-drawn buses. Dellers Caf  in Palace Avenue install another wonder of the age - electric light!
- 1900 Queen's Park sports ground is laid out on former marshland.

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## FURTHER INFORMATION

For more about the history of Torbay - visit the Local History Collection at Torquay Central Library. The following selection of material is available at all branches of Torbay Library Services:

Book of Torbay - Frank Pearce (1999)

Francis Frith's Torbay - John Bainbridge (1999)

Paignton - John R. Pike (Torbay's Heritage series 1993)

Pictures of Paignton - Peter Tully (3 vols. 1988, 1992, 1995)

Visit the Torbay Council website ([www.torbay.gov.uk](http://www.torbay.gov.uk)) for the following subjects:

History of Torbay/Torbay's Heritage/People and Places/Famous People. The site also contains opening times, news of forthcoming

events and general information about the following historic buildings and museums which are all well worth a visit:

Torre Abbey Historic House & Gallery, King's Drive, Torquay. Tel: 01803 293593

Torquay Museum, 529 Babbacombe Road, Torquay. Tel: 01803 293975

Oldway Mansion, Torquay Road, Paignton. Tel: 01803 201201

Brixham Heritage Museum, Bolton Cross, Brixham. Tel: 01803 856267



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