

5.3 Eighteenth – Early Nineteenth Century Lyme Regis (1700-1849)

5.3.1 Historical Summary

This period saw the waning of the port at Lyme Regis and witnessed the transformation of the town into a fashionable seaside resort. Lyme's decline as a port began in the late 17th century, but its economic decline became much greater from about 1700. The reasons for this are the general reduction of the west country cloth trade, the increasing size of merchant ships (for which the Cobb was too shallow) and Lyme's inaccessibility by land (Fowles 1982). By about 1750 the town was in serious decline, its population had fallen to less than a thousand inhabitants and there were very few well-to-do citizens (Roberts 1834, 153). The houses were in decay, many were unoccupied and others had collapsed or been pulled down. By 1760, its trade had all but ceased.

The rise in the popularity of sea bathing from the mid 18th century sees Lyme very quickly reinvent itself as a watering-place, for already by 1755 a bathing house had been established near the Buddle (Fowles 1982). Its development as a seaside resort is partly through the efforts of the radical philanthropist Thomas Hollis, who bought up much property in Lyme, built the first promenade in 1771, and established the first Assembly Rooms in the town. Lyme became a popular destination after the season finished in Bath and brought many distinguished visitors to the town, with perhaps Jane Austen being the most celebrated. As a result many new trades and occupations arose to meet the needs of the visitors. In 1788, the population was 1248 and by 1831 it had risen to 2621 inhabitants (Roberts 1834). There were about 200 houses in the town in 1774 (Hutchins 1863, 37).

The late 18th and early 19th century also saw

Lyme become popular for another reason – fossils. Lyme played an important part in the development of geology and palaeontology, with De La Beche, Buckland and Conybeare all having close connections to the area. Lyme. A number of fossilists are listed in the Trade Directories in the early 19th century. The most famous and important fossil collector in Lyme was, of course, Mary Anning.

Lyme's traditional industries declined in importance during this period. Clothmaking continued in the town but was much reduced. The industry revived somewhat in the early 19th century, with the construction of three cloth manufactories on the river Lim (Roberts 1834, 177). Stevenson (1815, 448) states that broad-cloth and flannels were made in considerable quantities in Lyme. Pigot's Trade Directory (1830) names Messrs Noon & Co and Messrs. England & Co as the principal cloth manufacturers. However, by 1847 the cloth industry had died out in the town (Wanklyn 1927). Shipbuilding continued, with at least 102 ships being built in this period before the yards closed for good in 1854 (Fowles 1982; Oppenheim 1908, 225; Wanklyn 1927).

In the early 19th century, from about the mid 1820s, the Blue Lias rocks at Lyme were quarried for use in making hydraulic cements (Draper 2001). The cliffs behind Monmouth Beach, Church Cliffs, and many of the ledges were broken up for stone, which was shipped out from the Cobb to London and elsewhere to be converted into cement. There was some small scale local production of Lias lime with a kiln behind Monmouth Beach and two near Church Cliffs (Wanklyn 1927).

There was some trade in the Newfoundland fishery and the Mediterranean in the 19th century and also regular ships to the Channel Is-



Figure 14: View along the Cobb, showing rebuild of 1824/5 in large Portland stone blocks.



Figure 15: Cobb Gate with Marine Parade to left, Broad Street to right and site of Assembly Rooms, centre.

lands and some coastal trade. In 1830 Lyme was made a bond port. As well as legitimate trade, the late 18th and early 19th centuries saw significant smuggling activity in Lyme, which continued well into the second half of the 19th century.

There were two major fires in 1803 and 1844, which destroyed a large number of houses in Bridge Street, Coombe Street, Monmouth Street and Mill Green. In 1824, a great storm caused much damage to the Cobb and to the town.

Lyme's road communications had always been bad, with most roads not being passable by wheeled traffic. The early routes eastwards to Charmouth along Long Entry and East Cliff were prone to slipping and coastal erosion. The Long Entry road had long since disappeared and the East Cliff road was slipping into the sea. Road communications were improved with new turnpike roads in the late 18th century. The Lyme Regis and Crewkerne Trust was established in 1757-8, with responsibility for the road from Charmouth, through Lyme Regis to Uplyme (Good 1966). The road between Uplyme and Lyme, part of the Bath coach road, was repaired in the 1770s. In the early 19th century the road was straightened in the section beyond Uplyme. The roads in the town were remade from 1822 onwards. In 1824, a new road was cut along part of the route from Colway Lane to Charmouth.

5.3.2 Town Layout

There was some rebuilding of the town centre in the 19th century, following storm and fire damage and from the general decay of the town in the early 18th century. Many of the existing historic houses in the town centre were built in this period. Church Street was widened in the early 19th century and Broad Street became a commercial street with shops. The early 19th century saw a number of new indus-

trial developments along the river. Cobb hamlet developed as a small settlement, stimulated by the provision of a new road linking it to Pound Street. The seafront was developed with the construction of a walk from Cobb Gate towards Cobb hamlet, the construction of the Assembly Rooms at Cobb Gate and the building of villas and baths along the front.

The new turnpike roads to Charmouth and to Axminster via Uplyme stimulated villa and suburban development to the west of the town from the late 18th century and also the beginnings of expansion along Charmouth Road in the early 19th century. The old road along the river to Horn Bridge largely fell into disrepair and disuse during the 18th century.

5.3.3 18th – early 19th century Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century town are shown on Figure 18 and are listed below.

1. *St Michael's Church.* The north end of the church (the former nave of the Norman church) was shortened in 1824, when the road was widened. It was restored in 1834. The churchyard was eroding into the sea as a result of quarrying works along Church Cliffs in the 19th century.
2. *Butter Market.* The lower part of Church Street was known as the 'Butter Market' in the early 19th century and may mark the position of a market place (Penn 1980).
3. *Broad Street Market.* The medieval market place at the lower end of Broad Street continued to hold a market throughout this period. A new shambles was built in 1750, to replace the earlier market house. It burnt down in 1844.
4. *Coombe Street.* Much of Coombe Street and Monmouth Street were destroyed by fire in 1803 and 1844.



Figure 16: View of Marine Parade looking towards Cobb Hamlet.



Figure 17: Cobb Hamlet with large villas on slopes behind.

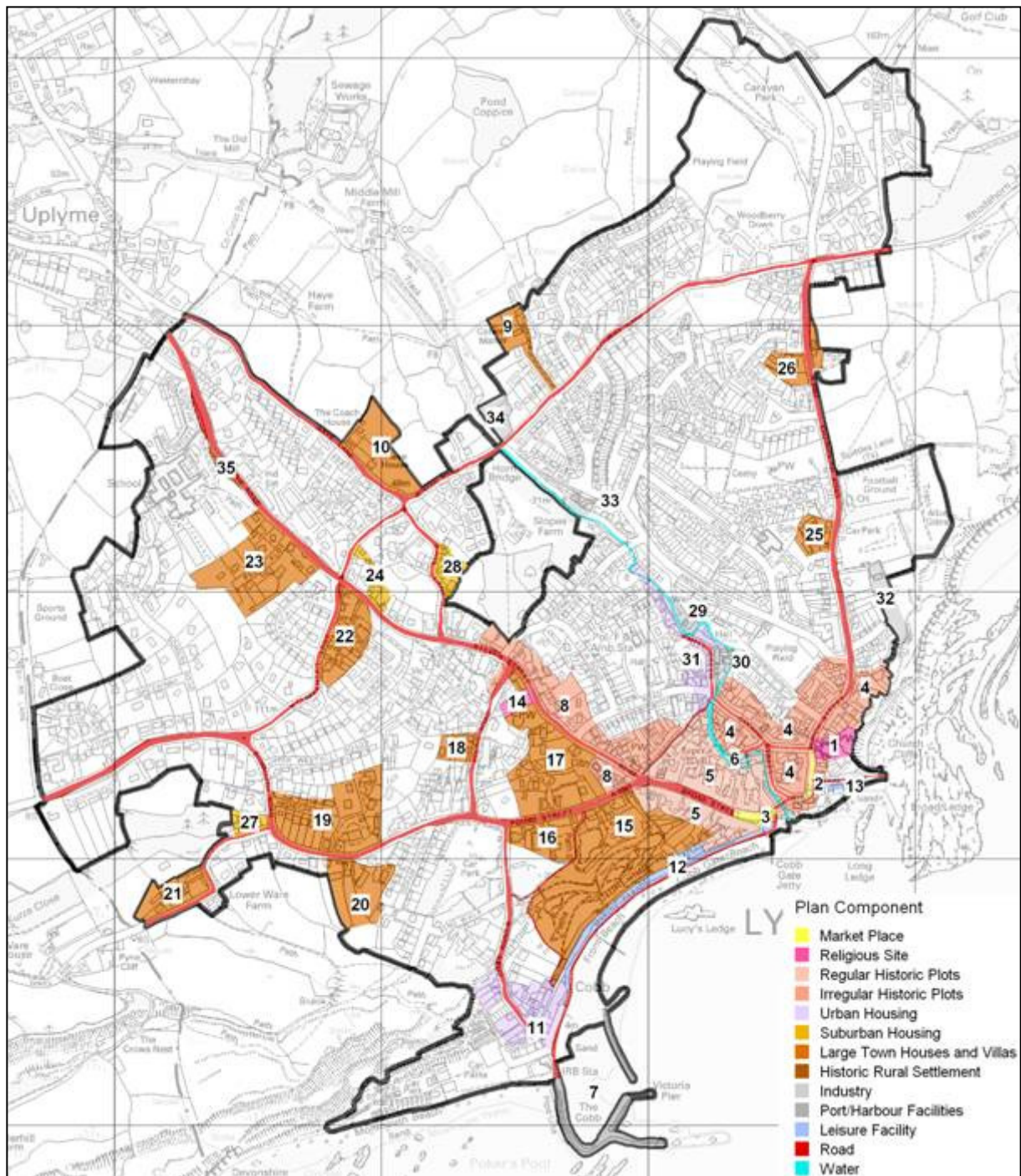


Figure 18: Lyme Regis Eighteenth—Early Nineteenth Century Town Plan Components.

5. *Broad Street*. In the early 18th century, there were no shops along Broad Street and in the mid 18th century it was the centre of the town's lace making industry, but this moved elsewhere as the commercial function of the street increased. Many of the buildings were re-fronted or rebuilt during this period.

6. *Town Mill*. There were changes to the mill in the 18th century to increase power and production. At the beginning of the 19th century, there was a major rebuilding of the mill with a new single wide overshot wheel instead of the ear-

lier double wheels (Graham *et al.* 2005). The building was modified into the form in which it largely survives today (Figure 19).

7. *The Cobb*. The Cobb was repaired and remodelled on numerous occasions during the 18th and early 19th centuries. It was remade using large shaped Portland Stone blocks from the late 18th century onwards (Figure 14). The north wall was first constructed in the 18th century and the present north wall was built in 1849. The Victoria Pier was added in the 1840s (Keystone 1994).

8. *Silver Street*. There was the beginnings of villa development along Silver Street in the early 19th century and some of the earlier houses were converted into villas.

9. *Colway Manor*. There is no new information on Colway Manor in this period.

10. *Haye House*. Haye House was completely rebuilt 1802 (Figure 20).

11. *Cobb Hamlet*. Cobb Road was built in about 1800 as a private toll road. The tolls were later removed and the road handed over to the town in 1832. Cobb Hamlet grew up around the Cobb, stimulated by the construction of the road. Some warehouses and buildings here were constructed by the late 18th century and there were several timber yards (Wanklyn 1927, 1796 map of the Cobb). In the late 18th century Mr Coade reclaimed part of the beach by enclosing it with a stone wall and built the southern line of buildings. A new customs house was built in 1846. The shipbuilding yards were on the west side (on the site of Ozone Terrace) and there was a lime kiln, built by the 1830s, behind Monmouth Beach.

12. *Marine Parade*. There was a footpath running from Cobb Gate to Cobb hamlet in the 18th century. Thomas Hollis established a promenade at the eastern end in 1771. The Assembly Rooms were constructed on the site of an earlier warehouse at Cobb Gate in 1777. In 1811 a wall with a walk along the top was constructed, but it was washed away by a storm in 1812. A new walk was built inside the earlier walk by about 1826. Lucy's Jetty was constructed about 1820.

13. *Jefferd's Baths*. The baths were built in 1805 for sea bathing by Giles Davie. After his death they were bought by Mr Jefferd and run successfully during the 19th century as the largest of the baths in Lyme (Roberts 1834, 182).

14. *St Michael's and St Nicholas' RC Church*. This was built in 1835-7 by H E Goodridge, in a gothic style with an octagonal belfry and a presbytery (Newman and Pevsner 1972).

15. *Poulett House and other large houses on Pound Street*. Several large houses were built along the south side of Pound Street, either on the frontage or set back in extensive grounds. The largest is Poulett House built in the early 19th century as the dower house of the Poulett family. The Lawn and Buena Vista are early 19th century villas. South Cliff (now Farnham House) was built on the old Bowling Green by Henry Franks Waring in 1842. Cliff House was built south of Stile Lane above Cobb hamlet.

16. *Belmont*. This large house, originally known

as 'Bunter's Castle' was built in 1774 by Simon Bunter, but soon passed to the Coade family. The present façade decoration in Coade Stone was done for Eleanor Coade after she was given Belmont by her uncle in 1784.

17. *Villas on west side of Silver Street*. The west side of Silver Street was gradually developed with a number of large villas. The earliest is 'Little Place', originally called 'Holmesdale', built by Richard Holmes in the 1820s (Figure 21). The Old Vicarage and Burley were built as a pair in 1832. Dorset House to the north of St Michael's and St Nicholas' RC Church is probably contemporary with the Old Vicarage and Burley. West Hill was built by Joseph Hayward in the 1840s. The Grove was built behind Silver Street on Pound Lane before 1840.

18. *Belle Vue*. A large thatched house built on Pound Road in the 18th century.

19. *High Cliff*. A large early 19th century villa built in a prominent position some time after 1811.

20. *Little Cliff and Holme Cleve*. Little Cliff was built as High Cliff Lodge at the same time as High Cliff on the other side of the road. Holme Cleve, lies just to the east and is a tall three-storey house built in 1828 and originally known as Gates Hill Cottage.

21. *Lower Ware*. A stuccoed villa, built at Lower Ware in the early to mid 19th century.

22. *Clappentail Lane*. Clappentail House is an 18th century or earlier house on the corner of Clappentail Lane and Silver Street. Behind it is Portland Lodge, built in the early to mid 19th century and accessed by a long wooded drive from Silver Street.

23. *Colway House*. Colway House was built in the early 19th century, perhaps as a remodeling of an earlier house.

24. *St Andrew's House*. Probably built in the early 19th century and one of the first houses on the north side of the east end of Silver Street.

25. *Summer Hill*. A large house built in 1819 by William Poole, a wine merchant in Lyme, as a speculation to let to visitors (Draper 2006a, 106).

26. *Fairfield House*. Built in the early 19th century together with Fairfield Cottages on the opposite side of the road for the coachman and gardener (Draper 2006a, 110).

27. *Ware Lane*. Several buildings are shown on Alfred Place, Ware Lane on an 1841 map (Wanklyn 1927). These include an early 19th

century semi-detached house and a short terrace of three houses.

28. *Little Park*. Formerly part of the grounds of Haye House. Little Park Cottage was built in the 18th century.

29. *Upper Cloth Mill*. A cloth mill was built on the river in the first half of the 19th century. It is called a 'new factory' on the 1841 map, but had stopped producing cloth by 1847 (Wanklyn 1927).

30. *Lower Cloth Mill*. A building is shown on the 1841 map along the west side of the river (Wanklyn 1927). This may be another mill, but is not labelled as such on the map.

31. *Mill Green*. A number of workers' houses and some larger houses were built along Mill Green in the 18th and 19th century, but some probably replace earlier houses.

32. *Gas Works*. The gas works were first built on East Cliff in 1835.

33. *Higher Mill*. In the late 18th and early 19th century, this was an oil mill, crushing flax seeds for making oil for paints (Claridge 1793, 28).

34. *Horn Tavern*. This was the site of a roadside inn, but had become a tucking mill by the early 19th century (Roberts 1834, 195).

35. *Uplyme Road Cottages*. A small group of cottages were built on Uplyme Road in the 18th or 19th century.



Figure 19: Town Mill.



Figure 20: Haye House.



Figure 21: Little Place, Silver Street.



Figure 22: Higher Mill.