

## Hallsands

The story of Hallsands is often told.

Many visitors come down to see the
ruins of the village and enjoy the
panoramic beauty of Start Bay.

We aim to tell the stories of what happened in this little fishing village, why it was built here, how the villagers lived and ultimately, how it was destroyed.

# A Changing Coastline

Before you begin to unravel the tale of Hallsands, it may help to understand a bit more about the bigger picture of the Bay.

The coastline of Start Bay fights a long term struggle with the sea. The nature of the bay means it often receives the full force of winter storms and tides. Over the years villages have disappeared and coastal roads breached. If you look beneath the platform you can still see the remains of the road that used to run into the village and down to the slipway and beach. This became impassable as recently as the mid 1990s.

Hallsands was lost as a direct result of shingle being removed in order to enlarge Plymouth docks just before the First World War.

#### The Science Bit...

The village was built on a secure rock ledge, originally formed when sea levels were higher (breaking waves create a terrace – a 'wave cut platform'). Over time the gaps in the rock you can see were filled with sand and earth which became cemented together, making a wide, flat shelf. The site may look precarious now, but the wide

shingle beach that used to be in front of Hallsands provided a protective buffer from powerful waves coming from the east.

What wasn't understood at the time the shingle was dredged, was that as Hallsands beach is bounded by cliffs at either end, no more shingle could wash in to replace what was removed.

What's more the shingle wasn't going to be replaced by the cliffs eroding – most of it was put there thousands of years ago by rising seas following the ice age. This meant that when the shingle was dredged from the water, waves and currents simply filled the holes with shingle from the beach. The beach just became narrower, the high watermark crept up the shore and the sea started to wash away the 'cemented' sand and rocks from the ledge.

Eventually, land gave way to sea and as written in the Western Daily Mercury 29th January 1917,

"Hallsands... ceased to be".

#### - 120,000 yrs

Sea levels are higher.
A wave cut platform,
the rock ledge that
the village was built
on, is formed.

#### -18,000 yrs

During the Ice Age, so much water is frozen that sea levels fall dramatically. The coast is about 20 miles further out.

#### -10,000 yrs

Ice is melting, sea-level is rising. The rising waters bring in the flint shingle from off shore to form the beach.

#### -3,000 yrs

Shingle stretches around Start Bay forming several ridge beaches like that between Strete Gate and Torcross.

#### 1784

First title deeds recorded for The London Inn at Hallsands.

#### 1857

Sir Robert Newman, the owner of the village dies in the Crimean war and the property is put up for sale. Most of the villagers are able to buy their cottages at a reasonable price. Hallsands is one of the few Devon villages at this time where nearly everyone owns their own homes.

#### 1891

Population of Hallsands reaches 159.

# Living on the Coast



perfect location for smuggling, which goes back to when King Edward I put taxes on the export of wool in 1275, to fund his wars. As a result merchants or 'free traders' looked for beaches and ports where 'Collectors' or tax men were not in attendance.

When standards of living were low, luxury items such as tobacco, tea, and spirits if bought legally, were out of most people's reach. Smugglers preved on this and provided the luxuries of life at a price that ordinary foll-

The contorted remote coast of South Devon made it a

centuries. The Board of Customs and the Board of Excise were responsible for the prevention of the evasion of Duty and had a small fleet of boats and a few men on the coast.

The Coast Guards were not local people. They were placed in villages where they did not know anyone and were moved on every few years. This was to reduce the possibility of collusion. They lived in houses built just outside the main village. At Hallsands, they lived up on the cliff tops in the small row of terrace houses you can still see today. There were also coastguards stationed at Lannacombe, Prawle and Torcross.

November 1896

dredging rights.



Throughout Devon the roads were so bad that Transport wheeled transport was unusual until the end of the 18th century. Goods travelled around the coast and up rivers by boat or into the hinterland via packhorse. One man could control a string of up to 20 horses but compared with the distribution of goods by boat, the packhorse was uneconomic.

The average coastal cargo ship in the 19th century could carry a load of 50 tons. To move the same by road required 400 packhorses.

There was also less need to travel outside each community in those days. Food was produced locally and most villages were fairly self sufficient.

Traditionally the communitie along Start Bay, including Hallsands, had a stronger connection with Dartmouth owing to the sea transport. This started to change with the better roads and the railway. This linked fishing communities to new marl for their catches in London, travelling via horse and cart to Kingsbridge.



Hallsands; Published Feb 1 1821; by J & A Arch, Cornhill

#### Why Here?

Hallsands seems to have always been a fishing community but why did the fishermen choose this narrow and uncomfortable rock ledge instead of the more open ground to the north?

• The long shallow • The reduction in piracy, with the advent of the Navy, must have made people feel more secure beach was ide about living right on the coast. for pulling the

> The proximity to the good fishing around the Skerries

The location was tucked into the

rock ledge provided instant

foundations for th

first houses.

boats up on.

'lee' of the cliffs from the prevailing

South Westerly wind and the flat



the fishing and potting grounds. 'Pits' in the seabed this side of the Skerries sandbank just off shore had plentiful fish and crab pots were strung just behind

> with irregular Pulling in the seine nets

frequent losses at sea. Crabbing was carried out most of the year interspersed with capturing larger shoals of fish with seine nets. A seine boat would be launched and rowed around the fish casting out a net from the boat and eventually encircling the shoal. This would then be pulled in from the shore.

#### **March** 1891

The Great Blizzard strikes the South West. Many ships are wrecked in the storm, including two large vessels off Hallsands The Lunesdale, a 140 tonne schooner and the Lizzie Ellen, a 73 ton schooner. No reports of any damage to the village.

#### 1894

The Royal Navy plans to extend Devonport Dockyard at Keyham, needing around 400,000 cubic metres of shingle. Extracting it from Start Bay is decided to be "a sound business proposition". The planning application is made without villagers being aware.

#### January 1896

Construction contract awarded to Sir John Jackson, who built part of the Manchester Ship Canal and Tower Bridge. Work starts immediately

Agreement made between Sir John Jackson and owners of the shingle (Board of Trade, for the Crown) to dredge just north of Hallsands Jackson has to pay the Board of Trade a fee of £50 a year for

#### **April** 1897

Dredging starts, at an average of 1600 tonnes per day, covering an 1100m stretch from just north of the village to Tinsey Head, the promontory between North Hallsands and Beesands.

#### April/May 1897

Removal of shingle alters the shape and angle of the beach so much so that the low water mark moves until it is actually further inland than the old high water mark. Holes left behind are not being filled in and villagers ask local MP – Col. Mildmay for help.

#### June 1897

Enquiry held at Hallsands Coast Guard station with villagers and a Board of Trade appointed inspector. Villagers stated that there was damage to their crab pots, disturbance to the fish and the lowering beach level was threatening their homes. Jackson said it was only a matter of time until new sand moved along the coast to re-fill the holes. Jackson won the case.

#### August 1897

As an act of goodwill, Jackson acknowledged the work was interfering with fishing and agreed to pay £125 to the community each year until dredging ended, plus an extra £20 as a Christmas gift. This amounted to around £4 per adult male villager a year (estimated at around £1500 using average earnings calculations for 2010). He also agreed to pay for any damage to pots or fishing gear.

#### 1897-1900

Dredgers and

villagers co-exist

no new shingle is coming into the bay. The Hallsands platform is unprotected and the rough stone between the clefts in the rock ledge is being demolished by waves and washed out to sea. Houses are damaged.

Beach levels have fallen noticeably and

Autumn 1900

Location

#### November 1900

Villagers petition their MP about damage to the houses. At spring high tide the sea now comes within 3ft of the village, rather than the 70-80ft it had been before dredging started. Cracks appear in houses at the south end of the village and the sea wall is undermined. Following another Board of Trade inspection, Jackson is ordered to provide new concrete footings to the sea wall and a concrete slipway for the boats, to compensate for the lack of beach.

#### **March 1901**

Kingsbridge Rural District Council writes to the Board of Trade complaining of damage to the road. Part of the sea wall protecting the London Inn collapses and needs rebuilding.

#### September 1901

A new inspector, Captain Frederick, concludes in his report that the beach had fallen 7-12 feet. He concludes dredging should be stopped The licence was restricted immediately.

# Focus on a Family The Trout Sisters

### **Early Days**

The Trouts were one of the large families in Hallsands. Eliza Ann, her husband William and their children Patience, Ella, Edith and

Clara, lived in one of the end houses at the far south of the village. William supported his family by fishing until he became ill. Patience left school at age 14 to take his place and work the boat full-time with her uncle. Ella later joined her sister and they carried on fishing off Hallsands all of their lives. Their father was very proud of the way his daughters had gone out into a very male world and taken on supporting the family. He died a couple of years later.

The girls had all grown up with the dredging and talk of the beach dropping. As their house was on the end, it received the full brunt of the storms and waves. It was ne of the first to be damaged and the women decided that they must move.



Patience and Ella on their boat 'The Guide' 1919

#### Hallsands Heroine

In September 1917, Ella was out with her younger cousin checking the crab pots beyond Start Point when they saw a steamer explode and disappear. She rowed for more than a mile through dangerous cross currents towards the sunken ship and arrived in time to rescue a crew member who was clinging to wreckage. The boat was later found to have hit a mine. The newspapers picked up the story and Ella was praised as a hero. She was awarded the Medal of Order of the British Empire, or OBE, on April 18th 1918.

#### Ella's Big Dream

One day whilst out fishing with her sister Patience, Ella got the idea to build a house on the cliff top above Hallsands. Using money saved from their wartime fishing Ella bought the land and a second hand wooden building that would serve as the family home whilst they waited for their compensation.

#### **Prospect House**

Disappointingly the authorities decided that for two homes the Trouts were due £150, much less than they were expecting. A chance encounter with a visitor gave Ella the idea of asking her bank for a loan, suggesting that if they built extra rooms for holiday makers they could cover a mortgage. He promised that he and his family would be their first guests! The guest house opened in 1925 and was so successful they asked for

another loan to extend it. They were not granted the full amount but undeterred, Ella and Patience did much of the work themselves, including making 8000 blocks made from beach shingle, digging trenches and installing hot and cold water in every room.

**Building blocks** for the hotel

#### **Trout's Hotel**

Trout's Hotel was the model of self sufficiency, providing its own vegetables, eggs, chicken and fish. The family ran the hotel alongside the fishing, even taking visitors out in motor boats for trips and to fish themselves.

Ella had achieved her dream. Patience died suddenly in 1949,

leaving Ella without her best friend and soul mate. In 1952, aged 55, Ella died leaving the



there in seclusion until her death in 1975.

The hotel was sold by auction and re-sold following restoration. It has now been redeveloped into luxury apartments and houses, and the name changed back to the original Prospect House.

This panel has kindly been sponsored by Amanda Lubrani, the developer of Prospect House, very proudly continuing the legacy set up by Ella and Patience.



Survey data, from Hallsands,

#### 1st January 1902

The destroyed fan home at the soutlend of the village

Villagers take action, pull ashore dredger marker buoys and prevent them from mooring.

#### 8th January 1902

The licence to dredge is revoked. After nearly 5 years of dredging, around 650,000 tonnes of shingle have been removed.

This is roughly the same as removing 1.5 metres deep from the whole of Slapton beach, from Torcross to Strete Gate, at low tide.

#### August 1902

The beach appears to recover, but this is only an illusion. Sand rather than shingle has drifted in on the gentle summer waves.

#### Winter 1902/3

All the new sand is removed and it is agreed that the level of the beach is at least 2m (6ft) lower than when dredging began. The winter storms bring extensive damage to the sea wall and houses, one is flattened and another made uninhabitable. Many struggle on with waves crashing over roofs and down chimneys flooding houses. It is clear that the villagers need help.

#### March 1903

Richard Hansford Worth is appointed as Honorary Engineering Advisor for the fishermen, to ensure they get a fair deal. He gives his services free of charge and is a strong champion. He is the first person to scientifically analyse the shingle which makes up the beach, to show that it could not be replaced from another source when it was removed by man.

Hallsands grew as a fishing village during the 18th and 19th centuries, reaching a population of 159 by 1891.

Looking down here now, it is hard to believe that this was once a thriving community, living under the cliffs, on a high ledge above the sea, protected by a wide shingle beach.

**April** 1903

There were 37 houses in Hallsands, mainly owned by their occupants, as well as a pub – The London Inn with stables, a post office, greengrocers, bakery, piggery and Mission Room.



pilchards. He would call 'Aye Boat' and wave his bowler It was a very hard life for the small community, which hat, worn just for this purpose. All villagers, including could not be sustained by fishing alone. In the winter women and children, would come out of the houses and and times of bad weather, some fishermen farmed the run down onto the beach to help pull the big seine nets in, plots on the steep slopes at the top of the cliff. Most village with the large catches of fish. men had other trades – tailor, carpenter and blacksmith The best of the catch was sent off to Kingsbridge for - to bring in extra income. In many ways the village was

out of withies (willow wands) which grew nearby. shing was the main activity of Hallsands, like other illages facing Start Bay. Everyone helped when the shoal

came into the bay. A lookout watched for the tell tale oily

South end of the village near the slipway 1902, making crabpots

film on the surface of the water indicating mackerel or

dispatch to London. They also laid crab pots, making then

dogs were trained to go out and bring in the end of the

The offer of compensation is increased to £1,750.

June 1904

London Inn, accept. Because of the dissent they reduce the offer to £3,000 but it is made back up by Mildmay, ever supportive of the villagers. All villagers agree to this in October, but have to sign a receipt stating they will make no further claims. A public fund, run by the Western Morning News raises a further £650. This money goes into a trust to build new houses as and when the villagers lose their homes. Mrs Spital took Sir John Jackson to court independently, for damage to The London Inn, and received £500 plus costs out of court

1903-4

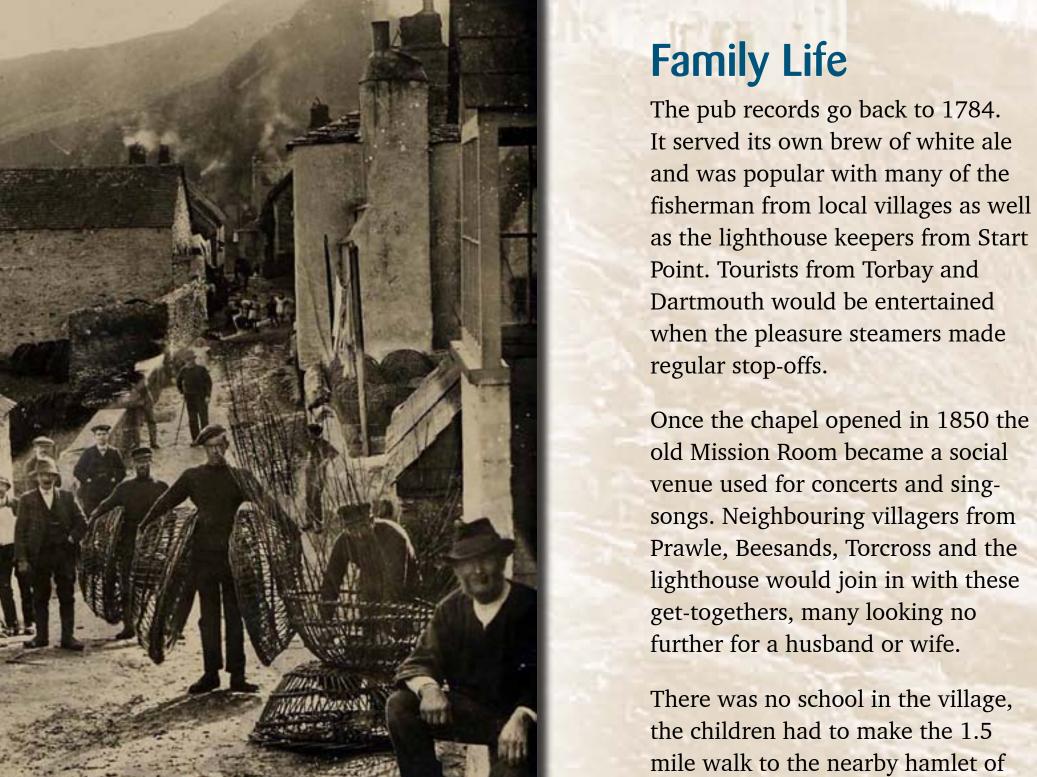
Charles Way, 1865. (by kind permission of Paul Way)

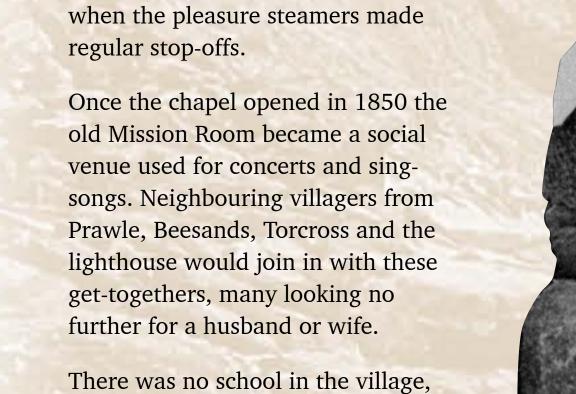
Strong easterly gales make conditions difficult, the village walls are breached 12 times destroying most of the north end of the village, the road and the pub. It also cut the south end of the village off. Some of the compensation money was used to recompense the owners of 6 houses which have completely disappeared and for repairs to others. The remainder is used to build a new sea wall to protect the most vulnerable parts of the ledge. Worth oversees the job and admits they will not be strong enough, but could at least be speedily built.

Jackson returns to remove a large quantity of sand from the Skerries sandbar, about 2 miles

A new stronger sea wall is in place to protect the remaining 25 cottages and their 93 inhabitants. The 4 families who were washed out of their homes are re-housed in new cottages on the cliff top next to the chapel, known as the Mildmay Cottages. They were built with money raised in the Western Morning

There is a period of relative tranquillity, although those living near the new sea walls get used to the sea breaking in the back door when there is an easterly storm. Fishing continues although boats have to be pulled right up into the village and the exposed rocks often tear the nets. Makeshift bridges are built over the open clefts in the rock ledge.





News appeal fund. Although the population falls to 79, villagers grow more

confident in their strong new sea wall and enjoy several years of peace.



1904 - 1917











## **March 1903**

Worth's first report to the Fisheries Commission shows that the beach in front of the houses had fallen by over 9ft (3m) and predicts (correctly) that the worst is yet to come...

The Board of Trade first offers compensation of £1000 to the villagers, for loss or damage to property, fishing gear and boats, and to repair the sea walls. Some accept, but many feel it is an insulting amount.

September 1903

The kitchen, beer cellar, and a bedroom of the London Inn collapses.

January 1904

The Board and Jackson offer a total amount of £3,250 which all villagers except Mrs Spital, owner of the settlement, far more than the the villagers had been awarded by the Board of Trade.

ropes attached to the crab pots, or boats,

when the sea was rough in bad

weather. It is also said that

the women of the village

waded out to the

launched boats in

the mornings, with

their backs, so that

they did not have

to start the day

with wet feet!

the menfolk on

Metres Map showing Occupancy c1915

# The demise of Hallsands

The tale of the demise of Hallsands is a long and complicated one. A timeline of events, globally, nationally and locally, which affected the village, as well as the impact on the villagers, is told all around the bottom edge of these panels.

This section tells the story in pictures and words from the time – quotes, newspaper articles and reports.

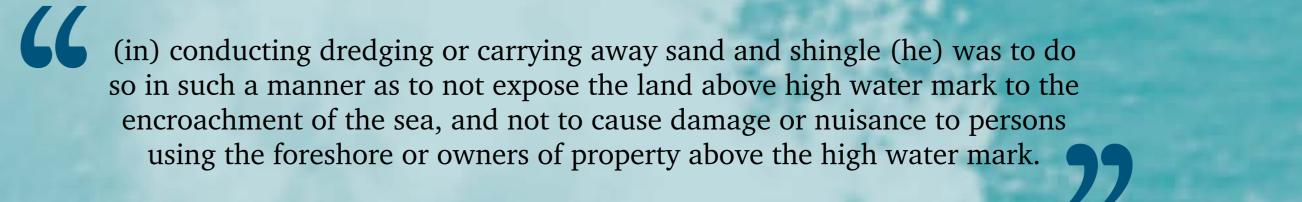
# Dredging



of the dredgers at work off Hallsands

The quantity required cannot be accurately stated but in no case will it be sufficient as to in any way interfere with the cliffs or adjoining land.

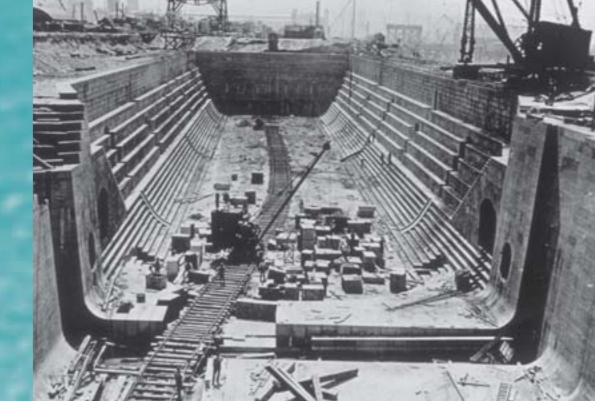
Application letter to Board of Trade from Sir John Jackson; for permission to dredge off Hallsands. 5th August 1896



Licence granted to Sir John Jackson by the Office of Woods and Forests (owners of land above high water mark)



Decision to extract shingle from Start Bay, 1894



Construction of extension of Keyham Docks

# away sand, shingle and other materials from that part of the sea bed between high and low water marks at Start Bay and opposite Hallsands and Beeson Sands (Beesands).

66 ...permission to

dredge, and carry

Agreement made between Sir John Jackson and owners of shingle (Board of Trade, for the Crown), April 1897

#### Autumn 1916

Storms begin to undermine the Trouts' cottage at the southern end of the village again. They move out.

#### 26th January 1917

Fishermen, expecting worsening gales, storms and a high tide, haul the boats high up into the village street and batten them down. The children are evacuated to the Mildmay Cottages.

#### 8pm

Spring tides bring huge waves which crash into the houses at roof height and destroy the buildings behind the sea walls from above. The houses built over the rock cavities, where the sand 'cement' has been washed out, collapse. Those built on the rocks are battered by wind, waves and stones. The villagers fear for their lives.

#### Midnight

Four houses have been totally demolished and none remain intact.

Amazingly, all 79 villagers survive and scramble to safety during a lull in the storm at low tide.

#### Dawn 27th January 1917

First light reveals a devastating picture, the sea is strewn with timber and broken furniture. The sea walls have held, otherwise many more houses, and possibly lives, would have been lost. It is likely that the next high tide will destroy all that remains so with the wind still raging, villagers work to salvage what they can.

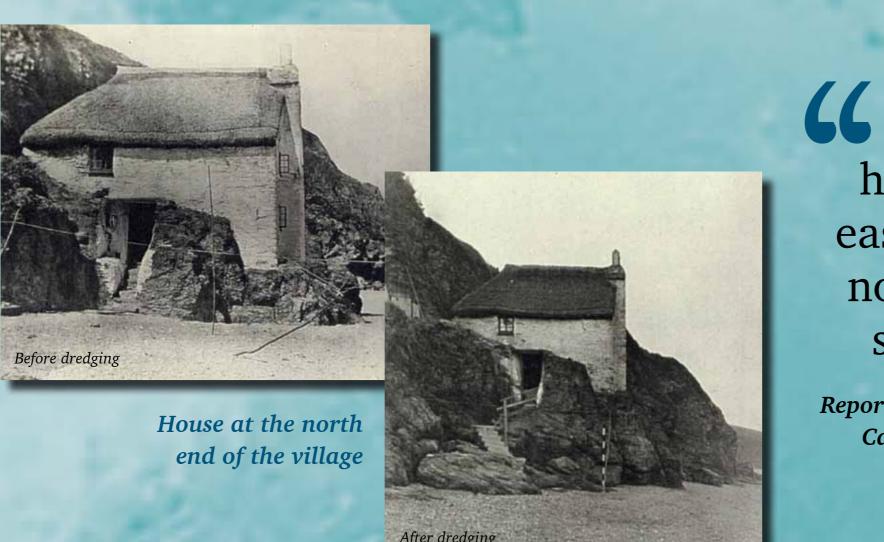
Damage

local enquiry upon the allegations as to the damage to fishermen's cottages and from the fishing industry likely to result therefrom 77

From Mildmay's parliamentary question to the President of the Board of Trade, 13th May 1897

insufficient grounds on which to revoke the licence

Inspector at Hallsands enquiry,
June 1897



In the event of a heavy gale from the east... few houses will not be flooded, if not seriously damaged

Report by Inspector for the Board of Trade, Captain Frederick, September 1901

The damage up to Saturday last had been mostly confined to the west side [north] and middle of the village, but now two cottages, at almost the extreme and east [south] end have been practically demolished, and a third one is in immediate danger; all access is cut from it, and it is isolated; whilst the earth and gravel have been sucked out almost to its walls.

Western Morning News, 15th December 1903



Ruins of Mrs Login's House, 1904

The villagers say that they have known worse gales before the removal of the shingle, when no damage was done, and if it sinks much lower they express the fear that they will be washed out like rats from a hole.

Western Morning News, 15th December 1903

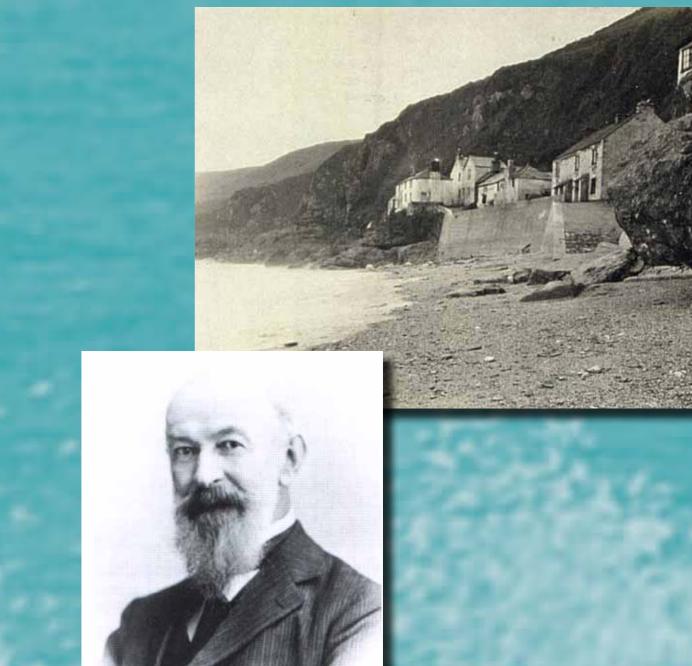
## Defences



New sea wall defences and slip way

...unless some properly considered measures are promptly taken, houses and roads alike must fall, with the exception of the houses founded entirely on rock, and that these will be left without access.

Richard Hansford Worth's first report to the Fisheries Commission, March 1903



#### 27th January 1917

The Kingsbridge Gazette leads with 'The beach went to Devonport and the cottages went to the sea.'

#### 28th January 1917

With the next high tide, the walls break and the village is destroyed. Only one house remains in any way habitable, the highest in the village, that of the Prettejohn family.

This gale was certainly severe, but was it really worse than the Great Blizzard of 1891? Worth pointed out that the 1891 gale had caused widespread damage, whereas the 1917 storm caused "only the occasional tree to come down" inferring that were it not for the removal of the beach at Hallsands, the village would have survived.

#### 1917-1919

Homeless villagers have to fend for themselves. Many stay with friends or relatives, but others are not so fortunate. Five men have to share a hayloft, some sleep in the ruins during the summer months. Funds raised earlier are all spent and local dignitaries take up the crusade for compensation. A claim is made to The Board of Trade but again they deny any responsibility and remind the villagers of the certificate they signed stating no further claims.

The Western Morning News runs a huge public support campaign and eventually The Board of Trade consents to an independent inquiry.

#### 26th September 1917

The Kingsbridge Gazette reports on the official enquiry. The Board of Trade appointed Sir Maurice Fitzmaurice to investigate and make recommendations. He ended saying that he would present his report to the Board of Trade and it was for that authority to decide the course they would take. The report of the Board's decision is not made public.

#### 1919

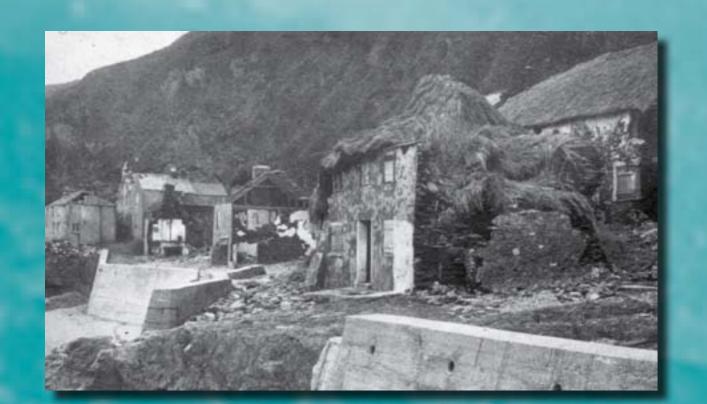
Compensation of £6000 is made to the villagers. £2,800 of which is considered the market value of lost property and goods, no account was taken of trauma or inconvenience. The remaining £3,200 is for the rebuilding programme. It is clear they couldn't afford to rebuild the 37 houses that once made up the village. Two more years of political wrangling follow.

#### 1921

The Fisheries Committee acting on behalf of the villagers decide to build 10 houses in Bickerton Valley, now North Hallsands. With 6 other houses having been built independently only 16 of 37 houses were ever replaced.

Elizabeth Prettejohn and her brother remain in their house in the village.

# Destruction



All of a sudden the walls came toppling down, the floor caved in. We felt like being right in the sea, the roaring waves bouncing over us, the rafters all breaking in. We could see the white waves foaming underneath the floors. The coal house all slipping away, no fires, the sea came down the chimney.

> Edith Patey, age 17, villager, 26th January 1917

The beach went to Devonport and the cottages went to the sea.

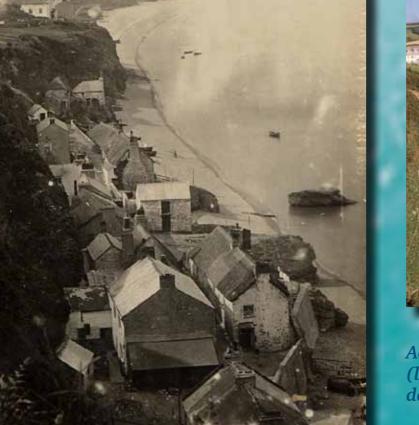
Kingsbridge Gazette, 27th January 1917

1924

A report recorded that the consequences of

What are we going to do?.... we have spent the whole of our lives here fishing. We know no other trade, and we are useless. We have no homes, much of our furniture is lost. I tell you it's hard, very hard, for our wives and families. It's all gone.

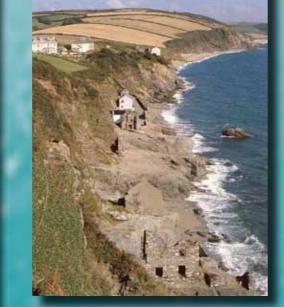
Hallsands fisherman, January 1917

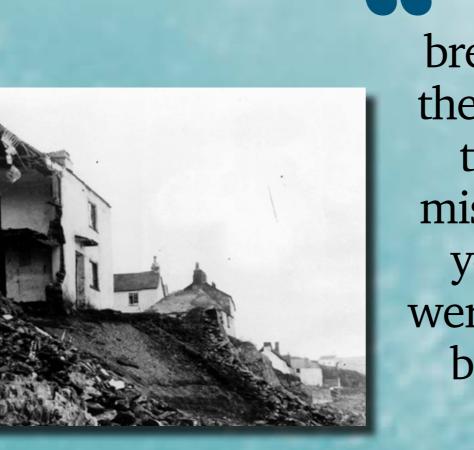


1995

A 'new' path down to the village is built,

6m inland from the original road.





The seas were breaking as high as the house. My great trouble was the missus and the four youngsters, who were asleep upstairs, but we got them safely out.

> James Lynn, villager 26th January 1917

If we offer (a grant) at once we shall only be pressed for more – the Hallsands fishermen, as past history shows, are past masters in ...One sympathises with them in the disaster which has overtaken them, but a year or more has now elapsed, and it is probable that by now they have managed to get homes and a livelihood.

> Assistant secretary to the Treasury, unpublished memo after independent enquiry for Board of Trade in 1918

severe instability and erosion.



66 This is the end of our village. We shall have to go elsewhere.

Hallsands villager, 27th January 1917

by the manner in which they have endured undeserved ill-fortune the inhabitants of Hallsands have earned the respect of all who have been associated with them.

Conclusion of report on Hallsands, 1924

I have all my memories here, but it's no good sitting down moping. It was the dockyard that took all our beach. It blew for four days and four nights. The sea was like mountains. I prayed God that the wind would stop... Once I thought of moving to Dartmouth, but this is where I belong with my memories.

Elizabeth Prettejohn, last resident of Hallsands village, until she died in 1964



a century after the Devon fishing village of Hallsands was washed into the sea, fatally undermined by commercial gravel dredging, an unpublished report has revealed how the fishermen and their families were cheated of compensation recommended by an independent inspector.

The Guardian, May 2002

1924

the dredging had been stabilized.

Elizabeth Prettejohn, the last remaining village resident, dies. The cottage is bought and turned into a holiday home.

The new path is closed because of

## 2nd May 2002

The Guardian reports

"Almost a century after the Devon fishing village of Hallsands was washed into the sea, fatally undermined by commercial gravel dredging, an unpublished report has revealed how the fishermen and their families were cheated of compensation recommended by an independent inspector. Local journalist and author Steve Melia has now found a suppressed report in the public records office at Kew in London, in which the inspector recommended compensation of £10,500 to rebuild the village safely inland, and unequivocally found that the dredging caused the collapse.

Mr Melia also found at Kew and in the county records, many memos from officials rubbishing the villagers' claims. In fact most were still camping out nearby, taken in by friends or neighbours or living in rented rooms. After the final collapse in 1917 the inspector recommended that all 25 houses and the reading room should be replaced, and compensation paid for the lost furnishings and fishing gear: £10,500 in all. In 1919, after endless argument and two years of inflation, just 10 houses were built at a cost of £6,000."

Fordworth Cottages are completed.