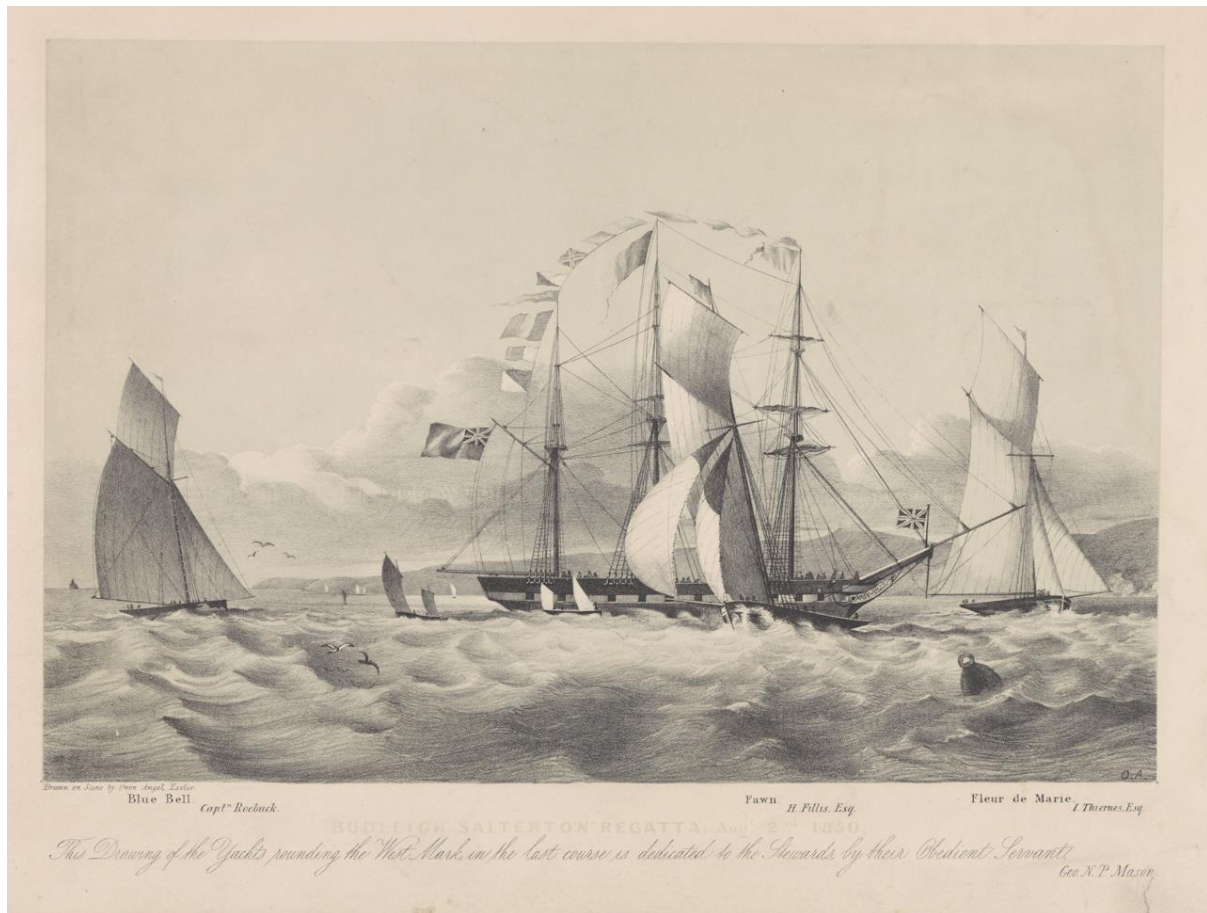


The Budleigh Salterton Regatta



A surprising discovery in Fairlynch's collection of paintings and images was this print entitled *Budleigh Salterton Regatta August 2nd 1850*. Surprising because none of the many books published on the history of Budleigh Salterton mention a regatta. Was the 1850 regatta a one-off or was it a regular event? Fortunately the British Library Newspaper Archive was able to confirm that the Budleigh Salterton Regatta was indeed a regular event in the 19th Century.

Judging by the vessels in the print it was clearly a serious race for the 25-30 ton yachts shown rounding the west mark. The Exeter and Plymouth Gazette records that the 20 mile course was raced for the Twenty Guinea Cup and was won by the yacht *Fawn* (H Fillis Esq) which beat *Fleur de Marie* (J Thierin Esq) by over 3 minutes and *Blue Bell* (Capt Roebuck) by more than 8 minutes. The regatta wasn't just an event for wealthy yachtsmen, however, it was a day of festivity and entertainment for the whole town. In the flowery prose of the Victorian era the Gazette recorded; 'this interesting marine village presented an appearance of unusual animation from the many decorations which had been called forth on the occasion of the Regatta. There were no fewer than six arches adorned with numerous flags and surmounted by crowns of flowers. Flags were profusely displayed not only upon the arches but across the streets and from many windows'. Regatta day attracted hundreds of visitors to the town to enjoy the promised amusements. There were sailing races for smaller vessels which included 'Salterton fishing boats' and two classes of 'Salterton punts'. There were rowing races for four-oared and two-oared boats and 'rural sports' which included; 'running for caps', 'eating bread and treacle', 'climbing for a leg of mutton', and 'jumping in sacks'. A

band played on the Rolle Arms Green and people danced. The day was rounded off to everyone's delight by a fireworks display. The Gazette report of 1850 makes no mention of regatta sponsors or a committee but clearly this prestigious event needed organisation and financial backing.

The 1873 regatta is reported as 'an annual aquatic holiday' and the organisation behind the event is clarified; The Hon Mark Rolle was patron, supported by a 13-strong committee of businessmen and town worthies. Many more racing events were recorded, including a prize of fifteen shillings for Salterton youths under 16 for rowing a 1 mile course won by Rogers in *Buccaneer*. Rogers and Gilley in the same boat went on to win the thirty shillings prize for rowing a 2 mile course. 'Rural sports' now included; 'climbing the greasy pole for prizes, which caused much amusement'. There were also swimming matches, donkey racing, and 'racing matches on the Parade for the youths of the town'. Music for this regatta was provided by the Exmouth Artillery band.



Late-19th Century Regatta Spectators. Note the bathing machines in the background.

The Gazette's report of 1883 lists the following regatta patrons; The Hon Mark Rolle, Sir John Kennaway MP, Colonel Walrond MP, JP Bryce Esq, and Dr Brushfield. The committee of nine included GK Loader (Treasurer) and H Cowd (Hon Secretary). The streets were decorated with flags by the Coastguard, 'under the superintendence of the obliging chief-officer Mr Ellis'. There were ten events of water sports; five rowing and five sailing for prizes totalling £50 (over £4,000 in today's money). During the day the Torquay and Weymouth Steam-packet Company's steamer *Prince* ran trips in the bay and to Sidmouth and Exmouth. In the afternoon The Hungarian Band played music on the beach and in the evening rural sports were held on the Parade.

There had been no regatta from 1879 to 1883 and it was dropped again in 1895 'owing to there being so many counter attractions'. 1896 is the last Budleigh Salterton Regatta reported by the Gazette. Whether it continued into the 20th Century is not recorded but its demise would certainly have been caused by the Great War in 1914. The regatta tradition reflected Budleigh Salterton's fishing community whose men were skilled at rowing and sailing. It is a fascinating aspect of the town's past.

Trevor Waddington