

Teignmouth, as the name implies, is situated at the mouth of the River Teign in South Devon. The entrance to the small but busy port is situated between a sandpit known as the Den Point, and the Ness red sandstone pine covered headland, rising some 180 feet above sea level.

The Port of Teignmouth has been in existence for many centuries, references exist which date back to AD 800. The Port flourished from the 13th century onwards, when several ships were then owned in the Port. Records exist on many voyages undertaken during the early 1300s and by 1347 the town, having recently recovered from an attack by the French, sent seven ships and 120 men against Calais; which capitulated after a long siege.

In 1434 a Teignmouth vessel, the 'JOHN', under the command of Richard Landsey sailed from Teignmouth with Pilgrims bound for St. James De Compostela, which was then the chief seat for the Order of St. James. The discovery of Newfoundland by Cabot in 1497/8 was later to be of importance to Teignmouth, and to England. By about 1530 good fishing had been discovered in the waters around Newfoundland, and the hardy Devon fishermen in their little boats of only 20 or 30 tons were amongst those who braved the North Atlantic to fish the waters there. The French and Spaniards also fished these waters, and keen rivalry existed between the Nations.

By the year 1770 there were 43 vessels engaged in the Newfoundland fishing trade. It was probably the late 17th century or early 18th century before clay began to be exported from Teignmouth. The clay had been mined for many years, less than 10 miles from the Port. It was therefore a logical step forward. In 1740 500 tons of clay were exported, clay being taken by cart or paniers to the cellars at Hackney (near Newton Abbot), and later Stover Canal where it was loaded onto barges for carriage down the river, where the clay was loaded into seagoing vessels moored at the buoys of Teignmouth Harbour. To-day, the Port, proud of its past traditions, continues to provide an efficient modern and friendly service to its Customers; some of whom have been using the Port for over 100 years. To this day, the main traffic through the Port is ball clay, mined in the nearby Bovey Basin, which accounts for almost exactly 90% of all the waterborne tonnage through the Port. The clay is exported direct to numerous overseas markets, this providing valuable Foreign currency for Great Britain. The remaining 10% of traffic consists mainly of grain, fertilizers, esparto grass, timber and slates, animal feeds etc. The Port is also noted for the speedy turn-round given to vessels, the majority of which are turned around well within 24 hours, and it is perhaps no accident that there exists in Teignmouth a spirit of co-operation between all the parties concerned in the movement of ships, perhaps an understanding which comes from men, whose families have for generations been connected with the sea and the ships which sail upon it.

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It is with this spirit of co-operation and understanding which enable the Port operations to function smoothly with an efficiency which belies the size of the Port. During 1974 406,590 metric tons of cargo were handled in the Port, carried by some 546 vessels.

The commercial docks and wharves are owned by the Teignmouth Quay Company Limited, who are also responsible for all the cargo handling and warehousing in the port. Good berthing facilities exist for up to 9 vessels alongside the quays. The length of the quays at present in use being approximately 1,640 feet, although a further 480 feet could be brought into use if required. As by far the largest proportion of cargoes loaded or discharged at Teignmouth are bulk commodities, large areas of quay space have been left open, to allow for the easy movement of conveyors, mobile cranes, road transport etc. The Teignmouth Quay Company also operates several modern mobile cranes, and conveyors, specially constructed to enable bulk commodities to be loaded at high speed. They are also covered to eliminate any potential dust nuisance. For palletised cargo, the Company utilise fork lift trucks, and flying forks. Where there are problems associated with storage the Teignmouth Quay Co., are modernising many of their older warehouses, and have re-built two large warehouses capable of storing many of the commodities imported through Teignmouth.

The quay at one berth, has been specially strengthened to allow for the shipment of extra heavy loads, and has been successfully used for this purpose, utilising a suitable roll-on, roll-off vessel.

As Teignmouth is a tidal port, the majority of vessels take to the ground at low water, except at one or two of the deeper berths. However, the bottom is of a soft nature, and it is usual for vessels to lie 'safe aground' at low water.

All the berths except for one at a fixed loading ramp, are dual purpose, allowing for the loading or discharge of cargoes, which enables the port to be extremely flexible in its operations. Teignmouth is fortunate to be situated approximately 12 miles from the proposed termination point of the M5 motorway, just south of Exeter, this being already well under construction, and with good access roads to Teignmouth. The town is avoided with a slip road leading to the docks. The journey from Exeter to Teignmouth taking somewhat less than 20 minutes. A regular passenger train service also operates to London, and other main centres. Teignmouth being on the main London to Penzance line. Other services can be connected via Exeter. The nearest Airport is also at Exeter, which is some 16 miles from Teignmouth, again with good access roads. For communications from ship to shore, the Port is equipped with a VHF radio station, the call sign: 'Teignmouth Port Radio', which greatly assists in co-ordinating the movement of vessels through the Port.

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The Navigational Authorities for Teignmouth is the Teignmouth Harbour Commissioners, who have the task of maintaining safe navigation within the statutory limits. The seaward boundary extends in a line from a bond-stone at the base of the Ness headland, to a bond-stone approximately 100 yards east of the lighthouse, standing on the sea-front. Vessels trading to Teignmouth have the benefit of the local knowledge and experience of three Trinity House Pilots, who conduct vessels safely from sea to harbour and vice versa, pilotage being compulsory for the majority of ships. However, even regular traders are well advised to take a Pilot, as the entrance channel varies from time to time and is subject to rapid change after bouts of bad weather, particularly strong winds from an easterly direction. Also at the narrowest part of the channel where sharp turns have to be made. The tide frequently reaches a speed of up to 5 knots.

The Port handles between 500 and 600 cargo vessels at the present time, but like many other small ports now faces the situation created by the decline over the past few years of the traditional smaller type of Coaster, and the necessity of shippers having to make use of larger vessels now usually over 1,000 tons deadweight, with an increasing trend to even larger 'Coasters'. The movements of the larger type of vessel when fully loaded have to be confined to Spring tide periods, which can result in bunching.

Due to the limits imposed by the entrance channel and the acute turns necessary to enter or leave the Port, Owners are normally advised not to fix vessels with a length exceeding 220 feet, or a draft exceeding 14'6" on the top of Spring tides, without prior consultation with the Port Authorities. The Port has in fact loaded many vessels over 220 feet length, but such vessels are only accepted after discussion with the Pilots in full knowledge of the vessel and its handling characteristics. Any Owners requiring information are advised to contact the Port Agents, Pike Ward Limited.

With the increased use of larger Coasters and the demise of the smaller vessels, the attention of the Harbour Commissioners has once again been drawn to the changing characteristics of the channel and the bar, which lie, teasingly outside the present limits of the Harbour Commissioners jurisdiction.

For centuries, Marine Surveyors of note, have indicated the desirability of stabilizing the entrance channel, and this matter has been uppermost in the minds of the Harbour Commission. Since 1948 the matter has again been the subject of close study, and with a considerable degree of foresight, the Teignmouth Harbour Commissioners, together with principle port users, requested the Hydraulics Research Station at Wallingford in 1965 to carry out further investigations into the movement of material affecting the Harbour and the entrance channel. As a result of their studies and experiments, using modern methods, the Hydraulics Research Station were able to confirm to some extent, the theories of earlier

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and after numerous experiments, over a long period, the Hydraulics Research Station proposed a scheme, which would if implemented stabilize the Harbour entrance, and possibly give a slight increase in depth over the predicted heights over the bar. The final report of the Hydraulics Research Station was published in 1970 and after further tests, the engineers report was published in 1971.

In order to obtain the powers necessary to construct the wall, the Teignmouth Harbour Commission, after discussions with Local Authorities and other bodies, sought to promote a Harbour Revision Order. Delays were encountered, and a Public Inquiry held in October, 1974. A final decision is still awaited, although the Department of the Environment has indicated its provisional approval. Recent figures prove that the Harbour Commissioners in 1965 took the right course of action, because since that time the number of small coasters has been drastically reduced. During 1965 the majority of vessels trading into Teignmouth were of the 300 to 700 ton range deadweight cargo capacity, with not one vessel exceeding 1000 tons deadweight. However in 1974, figures show that the majority of the ships to be well over 800 tons deadweight with 132 of the total of 546 vessels over 1000 tons deadweight.

The Port Authorities feel sure, that given the opportunity, they can and will continue in the years to come to give their Customers an efficient and competitive and friendly service that is second to none.

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