Towns of "Health and Mirth": The First Seaside Resorts 1730-1769

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Three centuries ago organised sea-bathing began to appear in England. For these first brave bathers, access to the sea could be enjoyed wherever there was a convenient beach, and a farmhouse or inn to provide them with food and accommodation. They were seeking improved health, but if they wished to enjoy the society of other bathers the facilities of a town were required. By the 1730s there are a number of references to people bathing at ports as different as Scarborough, Liverpool, Brighton, and Margate. Initially content to use existing facilities, increased numbers of bathers soon began to transform the life and the environment of ports and by 1769 belief in this new activity was sufficient to allow the first substantial investment in developments outside the area of the original settlement.

New behaviours, new activities, and new architecture began to transform coastal towns. Between 1730, the earliest reference to a theatre troupe visiting Margate during the summer, and 1769, and the construction of Cecil Square in the same town, the growing number of visitors prompted a change in the tone of these towns from hard working, religious communities to places where manners from London and the inland spas created a prevailing air of irreverent frivolity. Dr Richard Pococke, usually a keen observer of harbours and their activities, scarcely mentions the commercial life of Margate in 1754: 'This is a fishing town, and is of late much resorted to by company to drink the sea water, as well as to bathe; for the latter they have the conveniency of cover'd carriages, at the end of which there is a covering that lets down with hoops, so that people can go down a ladder into the water and are not

seen …'.[1] Such sources demonstrate that after the mid-eighteenth century the resort function was beginning to be in the ascendancy. This chapter will examine the process of transforming ports into resorts from the dawn of the seaside resort to the point where it was becoming clear that the long-term future for many of these towns lay primarily in health and pleasure rather than maritime commerce.

Sea Bathing and Ports in the Early Eighteenth century

The story of the seaside dates back to the Tudor and Stuart period. Leland's *Itineraries* (c. 1540) records a patient sent to a coastal village for the sake of his health; sea bathing was used for some conditions by the end of the sixteenth century; and Henry Manship refers to doctors in Cambridge in 1619 who sent patients to Great Yarmouth 'to take the air of the sea'.[2] At Scarborough sea water was drunk as a cure to supplement the spring water being imbibed at the spa, and by 1660 Dr Robert Wittie, in his book on Scarborough Spa, noted that bathing in sea water had cured his gout.[3] By *c.*1700 Sir John Floyer, the leading advocate of cold water bathing, was proclaiming that the sea could act as a huge 'Cold Bath' to cure many ills[4]

Scientists and medical writers were becoming enthusiastic about sea bathing, and there are indications from personal documents that people were taking to the sea by the start of the eighteenth century. In the 'Great Diurnal' of the Lancashire landowner Nicholas Blundell (1669-1773) his family sought medical treatment by visiting doctors and various spas, making a pilgrimage to Holywell in north Wales

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[1] Richard Pococke, *The travels through England of Dr Richard Pococke*, ed. James Joel Cartwright, (2 volumes, London, 1888-9), II, p. 86.
[2] John Leland, *The Itinerary of John Leland*, ed. L Toulmin Smith, (4 vols, London, 1964), IV, pp. 43-4; H. Manship, *The History of Great Yarmouth* (Great Yarmouth, 1854), p. 104; Allan Brodie and Gary Winter, *England's Seaside Resorts* (Swindon, 2007), pp. 9-11.
[3] R Wittie, *Scarbrough-spaw: or A description of the natures and virtues of the spaw at Scarbrough Yorkshire* (York, 1667), p. 172.
[4] Sir John Floyer, *The Ancient ΨΥΧΡΟΛΟΥΣΓΑ [Psykhrolysia] Revived: Or, An Essay to Prove Cold Bathing Both Safe and Useful* (London, 1702), p. 191.

and bathing in the sea close to their home at Little Crosby, near Liverpool. Blundell's first recorded dip in the sea occurred on 5 August 1708: 'Mr Aldred & I Rode to the Sea & baithed ourselves'.[5] No medical conditions were mentioned and therefore he may have bathed for pleasure during hot weather. A year later, Blundell's children bathed in the sea to cure 'some out breacks'.[6] In Lincolnshire Mrs Massingberd of Gunby described in a letter dated 2 May 1725 that 'Sr Hardolf Wastnage & his lady come in Whitsun week to a farmhouse in this neighbourhood to spend three months in order to bath in ye sea'.[7] Again, this is bathing on a suitable stretch of coastline, independent of a town; Blundell did not need facilities as he was near his home and Sir Hardnolf Wastnage relied on an accommodating farmer.

By the early eighteenth century some accounts of sea bathing make it clear that if a visitor wanted lodgings or entertainment, they would head for a coastal port. A bathhouse was mentioned in a Liverpool rate assessment as early as 1708 and in 1718 Samuel Jones, a customs officer at Whitby, wrote a poem praising the water of the spa and the sea for curing jaundice:

> Here such as bathing love may surely find
>
> The most compleat reception of that kinde;
>
> And what the drinking cannot purge away
>
> Is cured with ease by dipping in the Sea[8]

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[5] Nicholas Blundell, *The great diurnal of Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby, Lancashire,* ed. J. J. Bagley (3 vols., The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 1968-72), I, p. 181.

[6] Ibid, I, p. 225.

[7] R. M. Neller, *The growth of Mablethorpe as a seaside resort 1800-1939* (Mablethorpe, 2000), p. 13, citing Lincolnshire Record Office LAO, MASS 13/16.

[8] Henry Peet, *Liverpool in the reign of Queen Anne, 1705 and 1708* (Liverpool 1908), p. 56; Samuel Jones, *Whitby a poem* (York, 1718).

In August 1721 Nicholas Blundell escorted an acquaintance 'to Leverpoole & Procured him a Place to lodg at & a Conveniency for Baithing in the Sea'.[9] Chadwick's map of 1725 shows that the riverfront of Liverpool was already dominated by docks, and there was no suitable location in the town centre for bathing. Instead, this may have taken place at the north-western extremity of the riverfront where John Eyes' map of 1765 shows a bathhouse. A detached building on this same site appears in a 1728 engraving of Liverpool produced by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck, perhaps providing the earliest depiction of a waterfront bathhouse.[10]

In 1734 sea-bathing was recorded in Scarborough's earliest guidebook: 'It is the custom for not only gentlemen, but the ladies also, to bathe in the seas; the gentlemen go out a little way to sea in boats (called here 'cobbles') and jump in naked directly: … The ladies have the conveniency of gowns and guides. There are two little houses on the shore, to retire for dressing in.'[11] A spring was discovered at the port in *c.*1626 and by the 1660s it was a well-established spa where sea bathing and drinking sea water were added to its range of treatments.

By 1730 Margate was sufficiently busy to attract a theatre company from Canterbury to perform during the summer and the earliest reference to a seaside bathhouse dates from 1736 when an advertisement appeared in a Kent newspaper:

Whereas Bathing in Sea-Water has for several Years, and by great numbers of People, been found to be of great Service in many Chronical Cases, but for want of a convenient and private Bathing Place, many of both Sexes have not cared to expose themselves to the open Air; This is to inform all Persons, that

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[9] Blundell, *The great diurnal,* III, p. 52.

[10] A. Brodie, 'Liverpool: the first seaside resort' *Liverpool History Society forthcoming.* Check reference

[11] Anon, A journey from London to Scarborough (London, 1734), p. 36.

Thomas Barber, Carpenter, at Margate in the Isle of Thanett, hath lately made

a very convenient Bath, into which the Sea Water runs through a Canal about

15 Foot long. You descend into the Bath from a private Room adjoining to it.[12]

It was such a success that he soon constructed a second larger bath that could be filled

with sea water regardless of the state of the tide.[13]

In 1736 one visitor to Brighton described how:

We are now sunning ourselves on the beach, at Brighthelmstone, and

observing what a tempting figure this island made formerly in the eyes of

those gentlemen who were pleased to civilize and subdue us. The place is

really pleasant: I have seen nothing in its way that outdoes it. … My morning

business is bathing in the sea, and then buying fish: the evening is, riding out

for air; viewing the remains of old Saxon camps; and counting the ships in the

road, and the boats that are trauling.'[14]

These first resorts were mostly small working towns, or as John Byng snootily

described them 'fishing holes'.[15] In the early eighteenth century John Macky saw

Margate as 'a poor pitiful Place' and Lewis recorded that it was 'irregularly built, and

the Houses generally old and low'.[16] The earliest ports that added a resort function had

unpretentious buildings set in small plots separated by narrow streets and the

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[12] *The Kentish Post, or Canterbury News Letter*, 14 July 1736, cited in J. Whyman *The early Kentish seaside* (Gloucester, 1985), p. 160.
[13] *The Kentish Post*, or *Canterbury News Letter*, 27 April 1737, cited in Whyman *The early Kentish seaside*, p. 161.
[14] J. Evans, *Recreation for the young and the old. An excursion to Brighton, with an account of the Royal Pavilion, a visit to Tunbridge Wells, and a trip to Southend* (Chiswick, 1821), p. 37.
[15] C. Bruyn Andrews, ed, *The Torrington diaries 1781-1794* (4 vols., London, 1934-6), I, p. 87.
[16] John Macky, *A Journey through England,* (3 vols., London, 1714 -23), I, p. 50; John Lewis, *The history and antiquities ... of the Isle of Thanet* (London, 1736), p. 123.

buildings were predominantly vernacular in style and materials. Something of the atmosphere of a proto-resort can still be experienced in the old town at Margate, in the Laines at Brighton, or behind the harbour at Scarborough. Some modern coastal towns can serve as analogies for early resorts. A number of Cornish fishing towns evoke the character of early eighteenth-century Margate with its narrow streets, modest houses, and small harbour. Similarly, some settlements on the Kent and Sussex coastline seem to offer parallels for the eighteenth-century seafront of Brighton or Hastings, with small fishing boats sitting on a shingle beach and a haphazard arrangement of houses along the seafront. Liverpool is, of course, an exception, as a major national settlement with a large-scale port that eclipsed the modest sea-bathing function by the early nineteenth century and Portsmouth underwent a similar process. Quebec House, a bathhouse of 1754, survives near the docks, but by the nineteenth century the resort function had been exported a mile along the coast to Southsea.[17]

A number of these coastal communities, including Tenby which is discussed later in this volume, faced economic difficulties and the new interest in sea bathing came to their rescue. Margate had prospered as the base of a fishing fleet and as an outlet for agricultural produce from the Isle of Thanet. In 1586 William Camden described the people of Thanet as: 'excessively industrious, getting their living like amphibious animals both by sea and land'. Depending on the time of year 'they make nets, catch codd, herrings and mackerel, &c. make trading voyages, manure their land, plough,

[17] J. Webb et al., *The spirit of Portsmouth: a History* (Chichester, 1989), pp. 149-53; B. Stapleton, 'The Admiralty connection: port development and demographis change in Portsmouth, 1650-1900', in R. Lawton and R. Lee, eds., *Population and society in Western European port cities, c. 1650-1939* (Liverpool, 20002), pp. 231-2, 236.

sow, harrow, reap, and store their corn, expert in both professions'.[18] By the early

eighteenth century parts of the town's fishing industry had gone into decline, and in

1736 some people involved with the fishery in the North Sea had been forced to

abandon their occupation altogether.[19] Brighton was once a town with fishing and

cargo fleets launched from the beach, and this activity continued even after the first

aristocratic sea bathers arrived. However, it is clear that fishing was in rapid decline

from the 1660s and that the town's population decreased significantly during the late

seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[20] In the 1730s not all coastal towns were

suffering economically, but for those that could attract visitors, this new activity

provided a welcome addition to the local economy.

Changing Activities and Behaviours at the Earliest Resorts

The presence of visitors began to transform the behaviours and activities taking place

in towns that had previously been dominated by commerce and fishing. 'Scarborough

A Poem', published in 1732, celebrated a town of 'Health and Mirth' that apparently

rivalled Bath.[21] Primarily due to its spa, Scarborough had been attracting visitors

probably since the 1620s, and therefore had the range of facilities required by its

aristocratic clientele.[22] By the 1730s it had a circulating library and an assembly

room, which was described as 'a noble, spacious building, sixty two Foot long, thirty

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[18] William Camden, *Britannia : or, a chronological description of the flourishing kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and the islands adjacent; from the earliest antiquity* (London, 1806), p. 316.
[19] Lewis *Isle of Thanet*, p. 33.
[20] S. Berry, *Georgian Brighton* (Chichester, 2005), pp 2-5, 10-11.
[21] Anon, *The Scarborough miscellany* (London, 1732), pp. 1ff.
[22] W. Sympson, *The history of Scarborough-Spaw* (London, 1679), pp. 5-6.

wide, and sixteen high' with a 'Musick-Gallery' and attached card rooms.[23] A poem

published in 1734 described the gaiety of the assembly room:

> When Night to Vipont's the Assembly calls,
>
> Engaged in Play, or lur'd to stately Balls,
>
> While the soft Song, and artful Dance, conspire,
>
> To sooth the Soul, and raise an amourous Fire [24]

This poem appeared in a 'Miscellany' of poems and prose published annually

between 1732 and 1734. Much of the content suggests that a major attraction of the

nascent seaside resort was the presence of beautiful, scantily-dressed women. One

poem focuses on the appearance of women as they emerged from the sea in thin,

clinging garments:

> 'Tis here each Morn (while his full Bosom heaves)
>
> The green-ey'd God, the bathing Fair receives;
>
> With swelling Pride he presses round her Charms,
>
> Clasps her white Neck, and melts within her Arms.
>
> Now loosly dress'd the lovely Train appears,
>
> And for the Sea, each charming Maid prepares,
>
> See kindly clinging the wet garment shows,
>
> And evry Fold some newer Charms disclose.[25]

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[23] Anon, *A journey from London to Scarborough* (London, 1734), pp. 38-9.

[24] Anon, *Scarborough miscellany*, p. 1.

[25] Ibid., p. 3.

Other poems refer to nymphs rising from the sea and one, necessarily-anonymous poet, fantasised about what it would be like to be a flower on the bosom of Miss D--rc--.[26] This suggests that something of the more licentious manners of the spas was beginning to be witnessed in hard-working, often quite religious coastal communities. Celia Fiennes described at length the presence of Quakers at Scarborough when she visited in 1697; unfortunately there does not appear to be any contemporary evidence of their reaction to this new influx.[27]

Scarborough's earliest guidebook lists the people who stayed at the resort in 1733, including a number of dukes and earls, people with the time and wealth to reside at the seaside. Margate's ease of access from London helped to shape the type of visitors it attracted. Like Scarborough and Brighton, it was frequented by some aristocrats, but not in the same numbers. Instead guidebooks, songs, and poems refer, not always flatteringly, to the social range of Margate's visitors. This became more obvious after steamers were introduced in the early nineteenth century, but there was already evidence of Margate's social diversity in the 1760s, when George Keate, wrote that:

> The decent tradesman slips from town for his half crown, and strolls up and down the Parade as much at ease as he treads his own shop. – His wife, who perhaps never eloped so far from the metropolis before, stares with wonder at the many new objects which surround her … The farmer's rosy-cheeked daughter crosses the island on her pillion, impatient to peep at the London females …. The Londoner views with a disdainful surprise, the awkward straw

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[26]Ibid., p. 51.
[27] Christopher Morris, ed., *The illustrated journeys of Celia Fiennes* (London, 1984), p. 101.

hat, and exposed ruddy countenance of the rustic nymph; who in turn

scrutinizes the inexplicable coiffure of her criticiser...[28]

Scarborough was a well-developed resort by the 1730s as it had the

infrastructure of a spa town, and in the second quarter of the eighteenth century other

ports began to add new facilities in imitation of those found in the more sophisticated

spas. The process of development was gradual as local entrepreneurs became

confident enough to make modest investments. Circulating libraries were established

in any suitable building, and guidebooks to early resorts show that they were usually

contained in standard houses. At early resorts the need for an assembly room was

initially recognised by enterprising innkeepers. In 1763, an assembly room was

established in Margate at the New Inn on the Parade and in 1772 Thomas Hovenden

held his first assembly at the Swan Inn in Hastings in 'a suitable room, with a gallery

for music'.[29] Brighton was able to sustain two rooms. Assemblies had taken place at

the Castle Tavern since 1754, but a prestigious, new façade designed by John

Crunden in *c.*1776, suggests substantial growth in its business.[30] In 1761 John Hicks

of the Old Ship Inn opened new assembly rooms.[31] Johanna Schopenhauer, writing

later in the eighteenth century, described both:

The Assembly rooms are in two taverns or inns, The Castle Tavern and The

Old Ship Tavern. In the first, one may play cards and there is a coffee-house

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[28] G. Keate, *Sketches from nature; taken, and coloured, in a journey to Margate* (2 vols., London, 1779), I, pp. 104-5.
[29] J. A. Lyons, *Description of the Isle of Thanet and the town of Margate* (London, 1763), p. 16; G. E. Clarke, *Historic Margate* (Margate 1975), p. 76; J. Manwaring Baines, *Historic Hastings* (St Leonards on Sea, 1986), pp. 304-5; W. G. Moss, *The history and antiquities of the town and port of Hastings*, (London, 1824), p. 168.
[30] Howard Colvin, *A biographical dictionary of British architects 1600-1840* (New Haven, 1995), pp. 281-2 (a plaque on the building dates the façade to 1766); J. K. Walton, *The English seaside resort: a social history, 1750-1914* (Leicester, 1983), p. 158.
[31] Berry, *Georgian Brighton,* p. 27.

with a billiard-table and that sort of thing. The second is similar but has the advantage of accommodation for visitors although we thought the reception inferior to what we had met elsewhere in England. The rooms of both places consist, as do those in Bath, of a dance hall and several adjoining rooms for playing cards, taking tea and making conversation. All are prettily decorated and usefully furnished.[32]

Early assembly rooms had a certain architectural ambition; the same could not be said about the first theatres. Players from Canterbury came to Margate in 1730 and probably performed in an adapted building. In 1754 William Smith's company was able to use a permanent theatre, a converted barn in the Dane, and in 1771 a theatre was created in a stable at the rear of the Fountain Inn.[33] By the 1760s Brighton had a makeshift theatre in a barn on the north-west corner of Castle Square and in 1789 [JKW says 1788]) Blackpool still had a similarly rudimentary facility:

Beauty displays itself in the dance, and the place is dignified with a Theatre; if that will bear the name which, during nine months in the year is only the threshing-floor of a barn…. Rows of benches are placed one behind another, and honoured with the names of pit and gallery; the first two shillings, the other one. The house is said to hold six pounds; it was half filled.[34]

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[32] Johanna Schopenhauer, *A lady travels: journeys in England and Scotland from the diaries of Johanna Schopenhauer,* trans. and ed , Ruth Michaelis-Jena and Willy Merson, (London, 1988), p. 133.

[33] Malcolm Morley, *Margate and its theatres* (London, 1966), pp. 12-17.

[34] Sue Berry, 'Myth and reality in the representation of resorts' *Sussex Archaeological Collections,* 140 (2002), pp 97-112, at p. 105; W. Hutton, *A description of Blackpool in Lancashire; frequented for sea bathing* (S.I. Peneverdant Publishing, 1788, reprint 1995), pp. 37- 8.

The earliest purpose-built theatres appeared at seaside resorts from the 1770s, once resorts were sufficiently large and popular to make the investment worthwhile. The first performance at the future Theatre Royal in Weymouth was in 1771 and at Brighton a purpose-built playhouse was erected in North Street in 1773 by Samuel Paine, though it was superseded in 1789 by a larger one in Duke Street.[35] By 1778 a theatre, described as 'neat, and well adapted to its destination', had been built at Great Yarmouth.[36]

Accommodating Visitors: Transforming the Townscape of Resorts

Entertainment facilities in early resorts were initially small-scale, and often rudimentary as visitor numbers were small and uncertain. With an increasing clientele and, more importantly, a certainty that people would return each year, entrepreneurs began to invest in more ambitious schemes. This is evident in all forms of entertainment, but is particularly obvious in the accommodation being offered at resorts.

The first visitors had to find long-term accommodation in the homes of the indigenous population, existing inns only being suitable as accommodation on their arrival. In 1736 a visitor to Brighton noted that 'as the lodgings are low, they are cheap; we have two parlours, two bed chambers, pantry, &c. for five shillings a week'.[37] At Worthing the first holidaymakers lodged in a farmhouse while visitors to

[35] Yvette Staelens, *Weymouth through old photographs* (Exeter, 1989), p. 31; William Lee, *Ancient and modern history of Lewes and Brighthelmston* (Lewes, 1795),pp. 536-7.
[36] C. Parkin, *The history and antiquities of Yarmouth* (London, 1776), p. 400; Anon, *An historical guide to Great Yarmouth, in Norfolk* (Yarmouth, 1806), pp. 20, 61.
[37] Evans, *Recreation for the young and the old*, p. 38.

Margate in 1763 stayed in 'small but neat' houses.[38] Fanny Burney described the

house she lodged in at Teignmouth in 1773: 'Mr Rishton's House is not in the Town,

but on the Den, which is the mall here: it is a small, neat, thatched & white Washed

Cottage neither more nor less. We are not a hundred yards from the sea, in which Mrs

Rishton Bathes every morning.'[39]

Each of the earliest resorts had their own architectural character, reflecting

their history, local traditions of construction and available building materials. In 1761

Anthony Relhan described Brighton as a town:

> of six principal streets, many lanes, and some places surrounded with houses,
>
> called by the inhabitants squares. The great plenty of flint stones on the shore,
>
> and in the cornfields near the town, enabled them to build the walls of their
>
> houses with that material, when in their most impoverished state; and their
>
> present method of ornamenting the windows and doors with the admirable
>
> brick which they burn for their own use, has a very pleasing effect.[40]

At Margate a handful of buildings survive to provide a glimpse of the town

before its transformation into a resort. The Tudor House in King Street is a sixteenth-

century, continuous-jettied, close-studded house, the home of a wealthy citizen and a

number of other timber-framed buildings in King Street appear to have been re-

fronted in the eighteenth century. Other readily-available building materials were also

used. In King Street there is a two-storied house dating from the 1680s faced in

knapped-flint with brick dressings and in Lombard Street a brick building of the early

eighteenth century is decorated with small brick arches and pilasters. Some visitors to

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[38] O. Bread, *New guide and hand-book to Worthing and its vicinity* (Worthing, 1859), p. 4; Lyons, *Description of the Isle of Thanet*, p. 11.

[39] Fanny Burney, *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney,* ed. LE Troide, (4 vols., Oxford, 1988), I, p. 275.

[40] Anthony Relhan, *A Short History of Brighthelmston* (London, 1761), p. 15.

seaside towns may have been intrigued by vernacular styles, but early tourists soon abandoned romantic notions of living in picturesque cottages in favour of more space and greater comfort in their lodgings, though there was a limited revival of interest in quaint living at Sidmouth in the early nineteenth century. The polite architectural style and non-vernacular materials were associated with the metropolis and therefore sophistication; as early as 1698 Celia Fiennes noted that Liverpool consisted of 'mostly new built houses of brick and stone after the London fashion'.[41]

Residents began to build or rebuild houses to make them more appealing to the growing number of visitors. One of Weymouth's early guidebooks suggested that 'the inhabitants by such an influx of money have been encouraged to rebuild, repair, and greatly enlarge the town, which in little more than twenty years has undergone a considerable transformation.'[42] Relhan documented the start of this process at Brighton: 'The town improves daily, as the inhabitants encouraged by the late great resort of company, seem disposed to expend the whole of what they acquire in the erecting of new buildings, or making the old ones convenient.'[43]

The early guidebook to Weymouth used the word 'transformation', but most of the new development there before the 1780s was within the area of the pre-existing settlement. The first phases of the transformation from a port to a resort at other coastal towns also involved a similar process of modification. Initially the impact of visitors was limited to superficial changes, existing houses being tidied up, and perhaps extended, but by the mid-eighteenth century the fabric of streets was beginning to undergo some significant remodelling. In All Saints Street in Hastings the original pattern of medieval timber-framed houses is clear, but some have been replaced by taller, more regular, brick, Georgian houses. As this early phase of

[41] *Illustrated journeys of Celia Fiennes*, p. 160.
[42] Anon, *The Weymouth Guide* (Weymouth, 1785), p. 57.
[43] Relhan, *Brighthelmston*, p. 15.

transformation took place within the footprint of the established town, development was necessarily constrained by the pre-existing fabric of the port.

Additionally, no one in early resorts could have been confident that the vogue for sea bathing would last; there was a hesitancy to invest in large-scale schemes. However, by the 1760s a handful of people were prepared to erect more ambitious buildings for their own use. East Cliff House (1760-2) was built on part of the East Fort at Hastings for Edward Capell, a Shakespeare scholar who spent his summers at the resort.[44] In 1766, Captain John Gould, a wealthy tea-planter from India, returned to England and settled in Margate in India House, reputedly a copy of his home in Calcutta. The most prestigious of these early houses was Marlborough House on the Steine in Brighton, built between 1765 and 1769 as a large Georgian townhouse.[45]

By 1769 the pace of seaside development had quickened. Cecil Square in Margate, laid out by 'Mr Cecil', Sir John Shaw, Sir Edward Hales and several other gentlemen, marked a turning point in the story of the seaside as it was a major speculative venture based on London money (see figure 1). The undated 'A Summer Trip to Margate' described it: 'The new-square, which is a large one, principally built by Mr Cecil, an eminent attorney in Norfolk-street, in the Strand, consists of some very handsome houses, intended for the reception of the nobility and gentry.'[46] The new square also contained a row of shops as well as the purpose-built assembly rooms and circulating library that had been erected beside Fox's Tavern. Cecil Square symbolically breached the form of the historic area of the old town much as Queen Square marked qualitatively a new phase of development at Bath in the 1720s.[47] It also was the first case of businessmen collaborating to develop a large scheme and

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[44] M. Hunter, 'The first seaside house?', *The Georgian Group Journal,* 8 (1998), pp. 135-42, 135-8.
[45] C. Miele,' ''The First Architect in the World'' in Brighton', *Sussex Archaeological Collections,* 136 (1998), pp. 149, 156. This was rebuilt in a grander style by Robert Adam in 1786-7.
[46] Anon, *A summer trip to Margate* (British Library, undated [1770s]).
[47] Walter Ison, *The Georgian Buildings of Bath,* (2nd edn., Bath, 1980), pp. 5-6.

was the first new square built at a seaside resort. At other resorts terraced houses

began to be built along the seafront. In Weymouth the first of a series of terraces was

constructed to the north of the historic town in the 1780s and by the early nineteenth

century long terraces and crescents, with houses intended to accommodate visitors

during the summer, were being erected at resorts all around the coast of England.

Ports versus Resorts

> On a large Hill's Descent, stands the fair Town,
>
> Well built and neat, 'till now but little known.
>
> In Ages past, for Shipping only fam'd
>
> Possess'd by Mariners, and seldom nam'd,
>
> But now, of health and Ease the Source proclaim'd.
>
> Swiftly its praises round the Nation flew,
>
> The Nation, ever fond of something new,
>
> To taste its Virtues, in vast Concourse drew.[48]

John Setterington's view of Scarborough, published in 1735, is often cited as the first

illustration of sea bathing in England.(figure 2**).** This scene occupies the left half of

the engraving, but the right-hand section, which depicts a busy commercial port, is

usually ignored. Like the 1732 poem celebrating Scarborough 'the fair Town',

Setterington recorded both the commercial activity and the new fad for 'health and

Ease'. A similar blend of old and new appears in the famous view of Brighton beach

where John Awsiter's bathhouse of 1769 is illustrated alongside the working boats on

the beach.

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[48] Anon, *Scarbrough Miscellany*, p. 4.

To modern observers there may appear to be a conflict between port and resort functions, and the distinction would be obvious in a modern settlement through the zoning of two such different functions. However, in the eighteenth century the concept of the resort did not exist as a separate entity and writers saw sea bathing as an addition to the existing activities of a port. R. R. Angerstein visiting Britain in the mid-1750s described Weymouth's and Scarborough's new bathing practices alongside their commercial activity.[49] Weymouth's first bathing facilities were concentrated on the harbourside, in the form of bathing huts and later a bathhouse.[50]

The balance between port and resort has changed markedly since the eighteenth century. Some of the first resorts retain their commercial function, but at others, tourists now dominate the architecture and economy of the town. Brighton with its beach-launched fleet succumbed to the pressure of visitors. Holidaymakers came to dominate the seafront and the heart of many towns, and where they encountered existing commercial interests, there could be friction. Social tensions existed on the Steine at Brighton between 'the fishermen … the rough sons of Peter' and 'the female anglers, who are baited with all the allurement of fashion and gaiety'.[51] Inevitably, the fishermen lost this power struggle. At Margate the visitor was also triumphant, but at Hastings the fleet of fishing boats and the netlofts have persisted, albeit relegated to a small area at the east end of the beach by municipal pressure and modern visitor attractions.[52]

Not all successful resorts lost their port function. Scarborough and Weymouth are still home to fishing fleets, with the latter also accommodating a large marina. At

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[49] R R Angerstein, *R. R. Angerstein's Illustrated Travel Diary 1753-1755,* Torsten and Peter Berg, transl, (London, 2001), pp. 68-9, 227-8.

[50] A Brodie et al,, *Weymouth's seaside heritage* (Swindon, 2008), pp. 8-9, 12, 71.

[51] Anon, *A companion to the watering and bathing places of England* (London, 1800), p. 21.

[52] Steve Peak, *Fishermen of Hastings: 200 years of the Hastings fishing community* (Hastings, 2005).

both the harbour is a focal point for the town, but at Great Yarmouth it is possible for tourists to enjoy their holiday oblivious to the historic port and town on the river a few hundred metres behind the seafront. At some coastal towns the balance between the resort and port function tipped towards commerce. Dover, a prosperous resort by the nineteenth century, is now dominated by its coastal dual carriageway, cargo docks and passenger terminals.

By the end of the eighteenth century resorts began to be created independent of existing ports, as confidence in the idea of the seaside holiday proved sufficiently robust to encourage investors to create entirely new settlements. Examples include Hothamton (now part of Bognor Regis), which opened in 1791 and Hayling Island, built in the 1820s. Both were unsuccessful, but St Leonards, founded in 1828, was a success, no doubt assisted by its proximity to Hastings. A port was no longer a pre-requisite for a seaside resort, but for the first century of the seaside holiday in England the working coastal town was invariably the 'port of choice' for the fashionable sea bather.

Figures -

1   Cecil Square, Margate (© English Heritage AA049298)

2   View of Scarborough by John Setterington (Courtesy of British Library)