

Lyme Regis

Lyme Regis /ˌlaɪmˈriːdʒɪs/ is a town in West Dorset, England, 25 miles (40 km) west of Dorchester and 25 miles (40 km) east of Exeter. Styled "The Pearl of Dorset", it lies at Lyme Bay on the English Channel coast at the Dorset–Devon border. It is noted for fossils found in cliffs and beaches on the Heritage Coast or Jurassic Coast – a World Heritage Site. The harbour wall known as "The Cobb" appears in Jane Austen's novel *Persuasion*, in the John Fowles novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, and in the 1981 film of that name, which was partly shot in the town. A former mayor and MP was Admiral Sir George Somers, who founded the English colonial settlement of Somers Isles, now known as Bermuda. Lyme Regis is twinned with St George's, Bermuda. In July 2015 Lyme Regis also joined Jamestown, Virginia in the Historic Atlantic Triangle of Lyme, St George's and Jamestown. The 2011 Census gave the parish and electoral ward a population of 3,671.

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History

In Saxon times, the abbots of Sherborne Abbey had salt-boiling rights on land adjacent to the River Lym,^[3] and the abbey once owned part of the town.^[4] Lyme is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. In the 13th century, it developed as one of the major British ports. A Royal Charter was granted by King Edward I in 1284 when "Regis" was added to the town's name. The charter was confirmed by Queen Elizabeth I in 1591.

John Leland visited in the 16th century and described Lyme as "a praty market town set in the rootes of an high rokky hille down to the hard shore. There cummith a shalow broke from the hilles about a three miles by north, and cummith fleting on great stones through a stone bridge in the botom."^[4]

In 1644, during the English Civil War, Parliamentarians withstood an eight-week siege of the town by Royalist forces under Prince Maurice. The Duke of Monmouth landed at Lyme Regis at start of the Monmouth Rebellion in 1685.

On New Year's Day, 1915, the H. M. S. Formidable was torpedoed, the first major U-boat loss of World War I. A local lifeboat delivered bodies to the *Pilot Boat Inn* in Bridge Street. Lassie, the owner's dog, licked the face of Seaman Cowan when believed dead and seemingly brought him back to life. The namesake of this cross-breed became a legend of books, radio, film and television^[5]

Lyme Regis Lyme



Lyme Regis from the Cobb



Location within Dorset

Population	3,671 ^[1]
OS grid reference	SY337922
• London	130 miles (210 km)
Civil parish	Lyme Regis ^[2]
District	West Dorset
Shire county	Dorset
Region	South West
Country	England
Sovereign state	United Kingdom
Post town	LYME REGIS
Postcode district	DT7
Dialling code	01297
Police	Dorset
Fire	Dorset and Wiltshire
Ambulance	South Western
EU Parliament	South West England
UK Parliament	West Dorset
Website	lymeregis.org

In 1965, the town's railway station was closed, in the Beeching Axe. The station was dismantled and rebuilt at Alresford, on the Mid Hants Watercress Railway in Hampshire. The route to Lyme Regis was notable for being operated by aged Victorian locomotives. One of these Adams Radial Tank engines is now preserved on the Bluebell Railway in Sussex. The West Country Class steam locomotive No. 34009 was named "Lyme Regis" after the town.

In 2005, as part of the bicentenary of Admiral Nelson's victory at the Battle of Trafalgar, there was a re-enactment of the arrival of the news aboard the Bermuda sloop HMS Pickle. The actor playing the part of Trafalgar messenger Lieutenant Lapenotiere was welcomed at Lyme Regis.

Geography

Lyme Regis is a coastal town in West Dorset, situated 25 miles west of Dorchester and 25 miles (40 km) east of Exeter. It lies in Lyme Bay, on the English Channel coast at the Dorset-Devon border. In the 2011 census the town's parish had a population of 3,671. The town has grown around the mouth of the River Lim (or Lym) which drops from a plateau at around 200 metres before flowing around 5–6 km south and southeast to the sea. Its name is of British origin and is likely cognate with Welsh *llif* meaning flood or stream.^[6] Historically there were mills along its length. Its lower reaches are followed by sections of three recreational footpaths: the Wessex Ridgeway, Liberty Trail and East Devon Trail.^[7]



Blue Lias cliffs at Lyme Regis

The town is noted for fossils found on its beaches and in the cliffs which are part of the Heritage Coast—known commercially as the Jurassic Coast—a World Heritage Site stretching for 153 kilometres (95 mi), from Orcombe Point near Exmouth in the west, to Old Harry Rocks in the east.^[8] The coastal exposures provide a continuous sequence of Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous rock formations, spanning approximately 185 million years of the Earth's history. Localities along the Jurassic Coast include a large range of important fossil zones.

The Blue Lias rock is host to a multitude of remains from the early Jurassic, a time from which good fossil records are rare.^[9] Many remains are well preserved, including complete specimens of important species. Many of the earliest discoveries of dinosaur and other prehistoric reptile remains were made in the area around Lyme Regis, notably those discovered by Mary Anning (1799–1847). Significant finds include *Ichthyosaur*, *Plesiosaur*, *Dimorphodon*, *Scelidosaurus* (one of the first armoured dinosaurs) and *Dapedium*. The town holds an annual Mary Anning Day and Lyme Regis Fossil Festival. A fossil of the world's largest moth was discovered in 1966 at Lyme Regis.



People collecting fossils in Lyme Regis at the fossil festival



Landslip, east of Lyme Regis

To the south-west are Poker's Pool, Seven Rock Point and Pinhay Bay and to the north-east is Charmouth. The coast is subject to large landslips that expose the Jurassic-age fossils which can be found on the beaches. "The Dowlands Landslip" occurred on 24 December 1839, 3 miles (4.8 km) west along the coast in Devon, in an area belonging to Bindon Manor. About 45 acres (18 ha) of wheat and turnip fields were dislodged when a great chasm more than 300 feet (91 m) across, 160 feet (49 m) deep and 0.75 miles (1.21 km) long was formed. The crops remained intact on the top of what became known as "Goat Island" among the newly formed gullies. On 3 February 1840 a smaller landslip occurred nearby. The phenomenon attracted many visitors, and farmers charged sixpence to view it.^[10] The area is now known as The Undercliff and is of interest for its diverse natural history

In 2005, work began on a £16 million engineering project to stabilise the cliffs and protect the town from coastal erosion.^[11] The town's main beach was reconstructed and re-opened on 1 July 2006. On the evening of 6 May 2008, a 400 metres (1,300 ft) section of land slipped onto the beach between Lyme Regis and Charmouth. Police described the landslip as the "worst for 100 years".^[12] It necessitated the diversion of the South West Coast Path inland between Lyme Regis and Charmouth via the Lyme Regis Golf Course. Landslides caused devastation to the town in 2008.^[13]

Demography

In the 2011 census the town's parish had 2,431 dwellings,^[14] 1,770 households^[15] and a population of 3,671.^[1]

The population of the parish in the censuses between 1921 and 2011 is shown in the table below

Census Population of Lyme Regis Parish1921–2011 (except 1941)									
Census	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Population	2,882	2,620	3,200	3,526	3,400	3,450	3,760	3,530	3,671
Source:Dorset County Council ^[6]									

The 2012 mid-year estimate for the population of the parish is 3,637.^[7]

Religion



St Michael's Church

The parish church of St Michael the Archangel, above Church Cliff, dominates the old town. Dating from the 12th century, it was originally a tripartite structure with an axial tower. Transepts were added around 1200 and two aisles were added in the 13th century. A new church was built east of the tower and transepts early in the 16th century and the old chancel and aisles removed. The old nave was shortened in the 19th century.^[18] Mary Anning is buried here and commemorated in a stained-glass window provided by members of the Geological Society of London, an organisation that did not admit women until 1904.

Bethany Chapel, an independent Evangelical church, celebrated its centenary in 2014.

Landmarks

The Cobb

The first record of the Cobb, the town's harbour wall, is in a 1328 document describing it as having been damaged by storms. It was made of oak piles driven into the seabed with boulders stacked between. The boulders had been floated into place, tied between empty barrels. A 1685 account describes it as, "an immense mass of stone, of a shape of a demi-lune, with a bar in the middle of the concave: no one stone that lies there was ever touched with a tool or bedded in any sort of cement, but all the pebbles of the see are piled up, and held by their bearings only, and the surge plays in and out through the interstices of the stone in a wonderful manner." The Cobb wall provides a breakwater to protect the town from storms and separates Monmouth and Cobb Gate beaches.

The Cobb was of economic importance to the town and surrounding area, creating an artificial harbour that enabled the town to develop as a port and a shipbuilding centre from the 13th century onwards. Shipbuilding was significant between 1780 and 1850; nearly 100 ships were launched, including the 12-gun Royal Navy brig *HMS Snap*.^[19] Well-sited for trade with France, the port's most prosperous period was from the 16th century until the end of the 18th century. In 1780, the port was larger than the Port of Liverpool but the town's importance as a port declined in the 19th century because it was unable to handle the increase in ship sizes.

The Cobb has been destroyed or severely damaged by storms several times; it was swept away in 1377 when 50 boats and 80 houses were also destroyed. The southern arm was added in the 1690s and rebuilt in 1793 after it was destroyed in a storm the previous year. It is thought that mortar was used in the Cobb's construction for the first time in this rebuilding. It was reconstructed in 1820 using Portland Admiralty Roach, a type of Portland stone. After the Great Storm of 1824 Captain Sir Richard Spencer RN carried out pioneering lifeboat design work in the Cobb harbour



The Cobb, with boats grounded in the harbour at low tide



View from the Cobb

Lyme Regis Marine Aquarium

Open since the late 1950's, Lyme Regis Marine Aquarium is situated in an early 18th century stone building on the Cobb harbour wall. The aquarium showcases some of the abundant local sea life as well as offering an insight into Lyme's rich maritime history

Visitors have the opportunity to hand feed the shoal of tame Thicklip grey mullet, stroke a lobster, and hold a star fish. Other exhibits include weaver fish, wrasse, blennys, sea mice and crustaceans including hermit crab.^[20]

Other landmarks

Town Mill, a watermill dating from 1340, has been restored to working order and produces flour.^[21] It is powered by water from the River Lym via a leat running along a lynch. The *Domesday Book* records a mill at Lyme in 1086, so the site could be much older. Town Mill Brewery opened in part of the mill in March 2010.^[22]

Near the Town Mill on the site of an old chapel dedicated to St Mary & the Holy Spirits, is the "lepers Well". In medieval times "leper" was used as a general description of skin diseases and did not necessarily mean leprosy. A hospital that stood on the site 700 years ago is commemorated by a plaque on the wall of well.^[23] The well water still runs, although likely at a reduced rate. The land was left untouched for many years before it was landscaped as a visitors garden in the 1970s.

The frontage of the *Three Cups Hotel* on Broad Street dates from 1807. It is believed that Jane Austen stayed in Hiscott's Boarding House on the same site in 1804.^[24] Since then the hotel has accommodated Alfred Lord Tennyson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Hilaire Belloc, G. K. Chesterton and J. R. R. Tolkien, who spent several holidays there. In 1944 General Eisenhower delivered an important briefing before D-Day to senior Allied officers in the first floor lounge. It was used as a setting in the film *The French Lieutenant's Woman* in 1981. The owners, Palmers Brewery of Bridport closed the hotel in May 1990 and put forward plans to demolish the significantly historic rear of the building and replace it with retail units, restaurant, visitor and private accommodation.^[25]

The *Royal Lion Hotel* is a former coaching inn, dated to the first decade of the 17th century. It is reputedly haunted; many alleged ectoplasms have been sighted in the corridors and cold spots.^[26]

Culture

The museum was built on the site of Mary Anning's birthplace and family shop off Bridge Street. It houses a collection of local memorabilia, historical items and exhibits explaining the local geological and palaeontological treasures. It was formerly known as the Philpot Museum.^[27] Set into the pavement outside the museum is an example of Coade stone work, in the form of ammonites reflecting the palaeontology for which the town is famous and commemorates Eleanor Coade, who had an 18th-century artificial stone factory in London and seaside home, Belmont House, in the town.

The Dinosaurland Fossil Museum is in the former church where Mary Anning was baptised.

Thanksgiving Day has been held since Parliament decreed, at the end of the English Civil War, a day of celebration and prayer in Lyme to commemorate its victory over the long siege of the town by the Royalist forces. The celebration includes residents dressing in period costume to parade through the streets.

Annual events in the town include the Lyme Regis Carnival and Regatta, the Lyme Regis Fossil Festival (in conjunction with the London Natural History Museum), and Mary Anning Day. The traditional conger cuddling event takes place during Lifeboat Week. The carnival and regatta, organized by volunteers, takes place over a week in August. The Lyme Regis Gig Club regatta also takes place during Carnival Week.

Bonfire night celebrations include a torchlight procession, bonfire on the beach and firework display. A Christmas Tree Festival has more than 30 trees decorated and displayed in Lyme Regis Baptist Church. An Easter bonnet parade takes place each year in the town on Easter Sunday. A May Day fête features stalls and entertainment from various Lyme groups.

Lyme Regis is the home of B Sharp, a music charity for young people.^[28] It organises music workshops, performances and training, and signposts progression routes beyond B Sharp. It also runs an annual Busking Festival open to all performing artists, now in May, and an open air "Big Mix" festival in July to present music-making by young people.

The Marine Theatre, operated by the charity Lymearts Community Trust, stages a variety of live events.^[29]

In 2012 graffiti artist Banksy stenciled an origami crane on a wall adjacent to the River Lym at the intersection of Mill and Coombe Streets.^[30]



Interior of the mill



Coade stone ammonites



The samba band *Street Heat*, in the twilight parade marking the end of the 2006 'Lyme Regis Carnival'

Literature and films

The Cobb featured in Jane Austen's novel *Persuasion* (1818) and in the 1981 film *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, based on the 1969 novel of the same name by John Fowles.^[31] The poet Tennyson is said to have gone straight to the Cobb on arrival, saying, "Show me the exact spot where Louisa Musgrove fell!"^[32] The town was used in filming *All Over the Town* (1949), under the name "Tormouth".

The town community is portrayed in disguise in *The Earl's Granddaughter* (1895) by Georgina Castle Smith, writing as Emma.^[33] It also features in A. S. Byatt's Booker Prize-winning 1990 novel *Possession* and in the 2002 film adapted from it. Lyme Regis is the setting for much of the historical novel *Remarkable Creatures* by Tracy Chevalier, of which fossil hunter Mary Anning is a protagonist.



Marine Theatre in Lyme Regis

Sport

Lyme Regis Football Club, known as the Seaside, was formed in 1885. It is situated at the Davey Fort Ground on Charmouth Road and has three senior teams and five junior teams. The senior teams play in the Devon and Exeter Football League and Perry Street and District League. In its 125th anniversary year, 2010, Tony Cottee (a former West Ham, Everton and England striker) was made club patron.

Notable people

In birth order:

- Admiral Sir George Somers (1554–1610), English naval officer, knighted for his achievements, and Admiral of the Virginia Company
- Bartholomew Westley (1596–1680), nonconformist preacher, was buried here.
- Thomas Coram (c. 1688–1751) founded the Foundling Hospital in London.^[34]
- Mary Anning (1799–1847), pioneering fossil hunter on the Lyme Regis coast
- Abraham Hayward (1801–1884), writer and essayist, who brought a landmark case in the 1840s on behalf of residents to maintain a permanent right of way across the cliffs to Axmouth and Seaton.^[35]
- John Gould (1804–1881), artist and ornithologist born in Lyme Regis, wrote and illustrated 18 books on birds. The Gould League is named after him.^[36]
- Georgina Castle Smith (1845–1933), children's writer died and was buried here in 1933.^[37]
- Percy Gilchrist (1851–1935), metallurgist born in Lyme Regis, was most notable for his work in steel production.^[36]
- Sir Eric Bertram Rowcroft (1881–1963), British Army major-general and founder of REME, retired to Lyme Regis and died there.^[38]
- John Fowles (1926–2005), author of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and other novels, lived in Lyme Regis from 1968 until his death and was curator of Lyme Regis Museum from 1979 to 1988.
- Selima Hill, (born 1945), award-winning poet

See also

- List of place names with royal patronage in the United Kingdom
- East Devon Way
- List of Dorset Beaches
- List of fossil sites



Ammonite-design street lamps reflect the town's location on the Jurassic Coast

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External links

- [Town council](#)
- [Parish Church of St Michael The Archangel](#)
- [Geology of Lyme Regis area](#) (Southampton University)
- [Lyme Regis](#) at [Curlie](#)

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