

5.2. High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves

1. Location

This case study, alongside case study 5.1 (previously described), covers the majority of the Exmoor National Park's coastal frontage (with the exception of Porlock Bay towards the east). The study site is characterised by a number of northward flowing streams and rivers, of which the most important is the Lyn that flows into the Bristol Channel at Lynmouth. The coastal landscapes are typically wooded and deeply incised valleys running down towards the sea.

2. Why was the Case Study selected?

This site displays a section of the coastline that is broken by steep fast-flowing streams that run from the hinterland from height of up to 300 m down to beach level. With a rich covering of trees on the steep valley sides and along the coast, together with limited agriculture on some of the gentler slopes, the study site includes numerous locations designated for both their geological and environmental importance, as well as some for their cultural heritage.

3. Summary of Geology, Geomorphology, Processes and Environment

The geology comprises sandstones, siltstones and slates of the early Devonian Period, together with later outcrops of the Torbay and Tamar Groups. The undefended sections of coast are generally resilient, although weathering, coastal erosion and cliff instability have resulted in limited retreat over time. Coastal defences are in place at Lynmouth and substantial improvements have been made to flood defences at the mouth of the Lyn following the disasters in 1952 and the 2013/14 storm event.

There are numerous cultural heritage sites located throughout this case study, including Iron Age remains within the Lyn Valley and at Bury Castle. Whilst, architecturally, Culborne Church and the villages of the Holnicote Estate in the ownership of the National Trust are carefully conserved.

4. How can the art imagery inform us of changes that have affected the case study over time?

This case study is the most richly illustrated of the nine case studies spanning Exmoor National Park. The dramatic coastal scenery incised by south flowing romantic and picturesque river gorges, together with the popularity of the resorts of Lynmouth and Lynton and the attractive outlying villages, all contribute to this rich art resource.

The art imagery extends from the late eighteenth century when William Gilpin encouraged travelling writers and artists to paint the *picturesque*. As a result, the gorge-like valleys of the River Lyn, crossed by numerous stone bridges, the waterfalls and rapids and the towering valley sides, eventually emerging at the sea, proved an irresistible attraction for many of our greatest artists. In terms of the Lyn Valley, the early artworks show a landscape that is more open and less tree covered than today; this is evident in the watercolours by the Reverend John Swete, painted in c.1795/96. Other images show river defences and sluices, which helped control the flow of water downstream; massive boulders show evidence of past storm events through the valley. The watercolours by Swete, John White Abbott and others show single arch stone bridges providing a means of crossing the river. These have been largely replaced by timber footbridges at key crossing points, such as at Watersmeet at the confluence of the West Lyn and the Farley Water/Hoar Oak Water. This particular location attracted numerous artists and a chronology is provided by their works, running from the 1790s until the 1920s when Alfred Robert Quinton produced watercolour views for the postcard manufacturers J. & F. Salmon of Sevenoaks. The attractively located tea rooms adjacent to the river at Watersmeet drew many Victorian and Edwardian visitors, as indeed the site does today, and this encouraged the production of more artworks for sale to customers.

George Rowe and William Spreat produced exceptionally fine lithographs of the Lyn Valley and this part of the Exmoor coastline. Lithography allows fine detail to be drawn and this includes the

patchworks of cultivated slopes behind Lynmouth, which, today, are largely covered by trees or by development.

Lynmouth itself has an exceptional range of art images, again spanning a period of nearly 250 years. A sequence of these is illustrated through Figures 2.2.-2.7. on page 13 in this report.

The distinctive row of cottages rising up Mars Hill retain much of their character and some of the key buildings of architectural significance have been preserved; changes to them can be traced through the art imagery over time. Interestingly also, very detailed lithographs and watercolour drawings allow the chronology of river flood defences to be noted, and alongside this the increasing development that took place particularly in the late nineteenth century can be seen.

The topographical engravers from the 1830s and '40s have provided us with a rich legacy of coastal artworks, particularly looking eastwards from Lynton, including, for example, views of the Valley of Rocks Hotel towards Countisbury Hill and the coastline further to the east; the steep winding coastal road up the hill is a prominent feature in many of these early views. Similarly, these lithographs show the nature of the countryside looking down onto Lynmouth and Lynton from across the valley sides, showing rocky outcrops, the extent of woodland, some of the prominent villas and the location of areas devoted to agriculture, often distinctively bounded by hedges.

This case study has a rich cultural heritage and prominent landmarks, such as the Rhenish Tower on the shore at Lynmouth, were painted by numerous artists including Birket Foster, the prolific Frederick Jones, David Cox and, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Alfred Robert Quinton. The harbour itself and the adjacent coastline extending along to Woody Bay, was painted in detail by Albert Goodwin. His interesting watercolour (**Figure 5.2.25 below**) shows the shoreline at low tide, the nature of the beach and coastal defences, and the patterns of agriculture on the steep lower slopes of the hill behind.

This case study area extends inland to include some of the more remote hamlets and villages, including Selworthy, which is an estate village that formed part of the Holnicote Estate. Very little change can be observed today compared with Alfred Robert Quinton's watercolour view of 1926. What is believed to be England's smallest church at Culborne was engraved by John L. W. Page and illustrated in his *An Exploration of Exmoor* (Page, 1890)¹. In 1837, the artist, James Bulwer, produced watercolours of Oare Village and church, which were made famous in R. D. Blackmore's popular novel, *Lorna Doone* (Blackmore, 1869)².

5. What are the key issues that can be learnt from this case study?

The wide range of images available for this case study produced over the extended time period from the 1790s until the 1920s illustrate and help us understand change as a result of physical processes, both coastal and fluvial, as well as landscape change as a result of changing farming practices, and the gradual expansion of development at Lynton and Lynmouth over time.

Observable changes are an apparent increase in tree growth within the steep valley of the Lyn, the spread of gorse at the expense of heather in some of the uplands and the cultivation of the upper slopes, which have now often reverted to woodland. The influence of tourism development and the pressures it has imposed over time, include the expansion of the built environment and the road network. Despite these pressures, most obvious at Lynmouth and Lynton, the overall character of the two towns has been retained with many of the buildings of architectural significance still remaining, despite the devastating flood events that have taken place at Lynmouth over the last century. In outlying areas, the estate villages, such as at Selworthy, have also retained their unique character in the hands of the National Trust.

6. References

1. Page, J. W. 1890. *An Exploration of Exmoor and the Highlands of West Somerset*. Seeley & Co. London.
2. Blackmore, R. D. c.1869. *Lorna Doone*. Sampson Low, Son & Marston.



Figure 5.2.1 (Left): *The Beach at Culborne* backed by the rugged cliffs is illustrated in this watercolour painted in 1826.

Courtesy: Yale Center for British Art.



Figure 5.2.2 (Left): *Culborne Church*, c.1834 by James Bulwer, a fine architectural watercolour.

Courtesy: Yale Center for British Art.

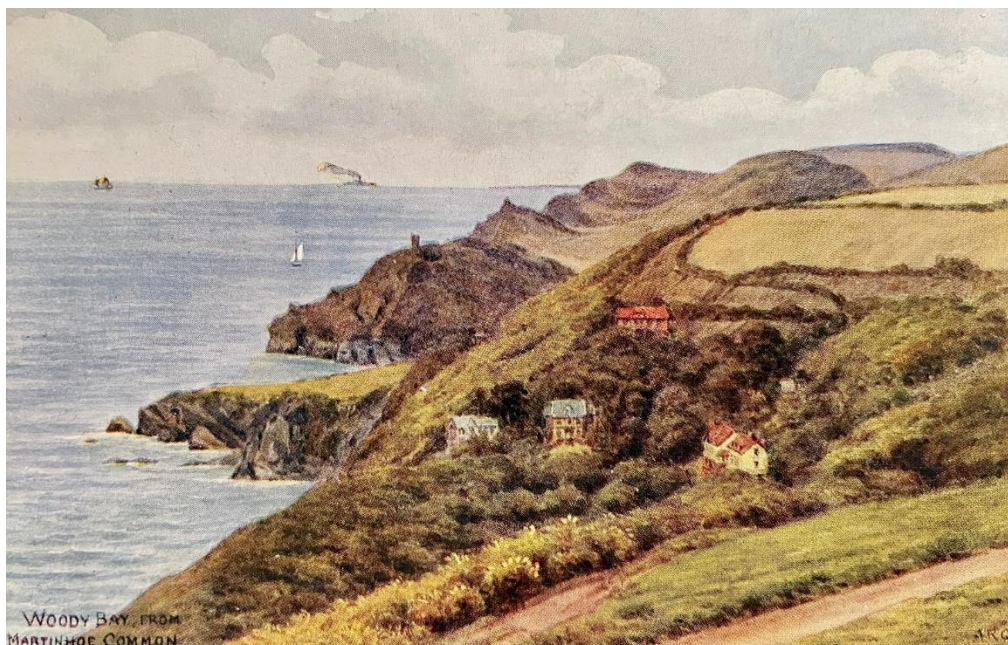
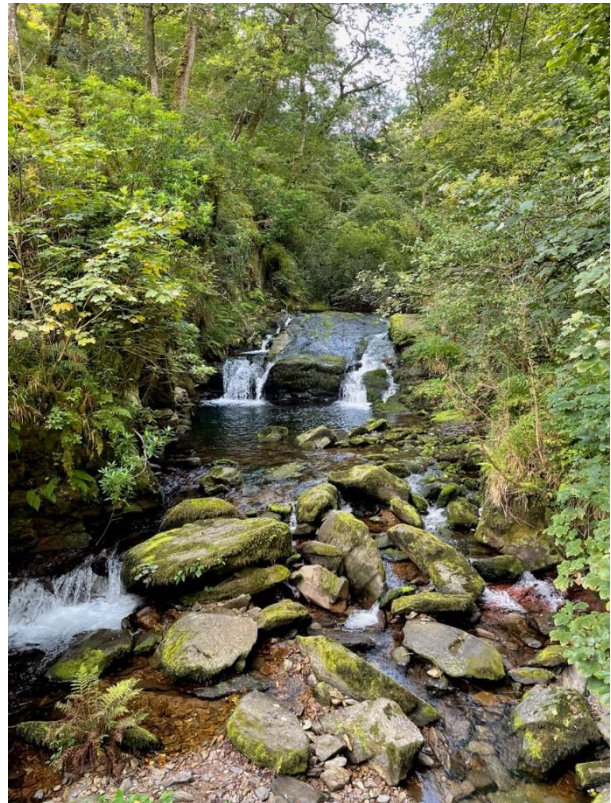
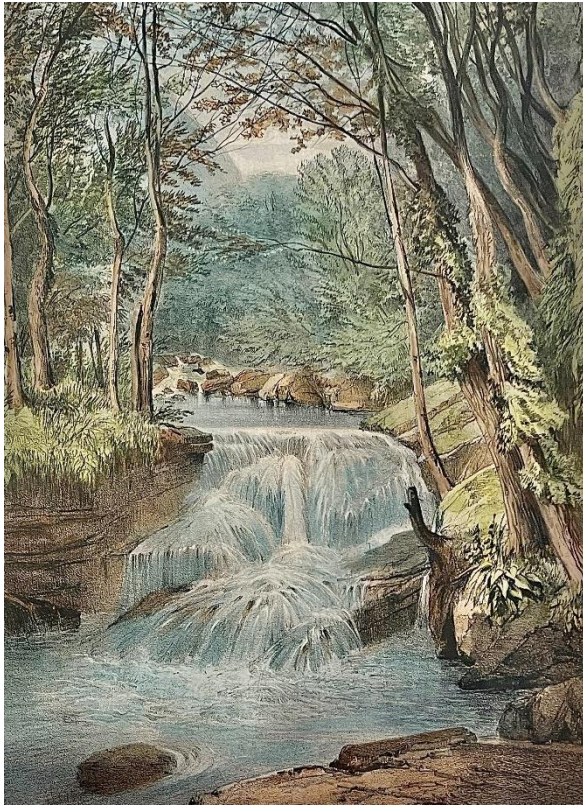


Figure 5.2.3 (Left) shows *Woody Bay from Martinhoe Common* and was painted in watercolour by A. R. Quinton in c.1920. Quinton provided numerous views of the Devon coast, often in great detail. The Photograph (**Figure 5.2.4 Above Right**) shows the view of Woody Bay today showing the striking geology and bold headlands.

Image Courtesy: Middle Left: Lewis Clarke/Geograph, Above: Salmon's.



The valleys of the East and West Lyn, and their confluence at Watersmeet to the north of Lynmouth, were painted by numerous artists since the late eighteenth century. **Figure 5.2.5 (Above Left)** is a lithograph of Watersmeet, c.1850, and can be compared with the present-day view, **Figure 5.2.6 (Above Right)**; there appears to be little change over time. The picturesque view of the Lyn Valley further down river by John Syer, c.1850 (**Figure 5.2.7 Below**), shows cottages in the valley, and a sluice as an only means of helping to control flows.





Courtesy: Birmingham Museums Trust

Figure 5.2.8 (Above): *Watersmeet* by Henry Gastineau painted in 1836, provides a detailed record of the river scenery at this picturesque location in the mid-nineteenth century. **Figure 5.2.9 (Below)** of *On the East Lyn* was painted in oils by the river artist, William Mellor, in c.1895.





Figure 5.2.10 (Above) shows a spate on the lower reaches of the Lyn. Many of the buildings located so close to the river itself have been lost in past flood events, which carried huge boulders down through the valleys and destroying the old bridges. **Figure 5.2.11 (Below)**, a lithograph by George Rowe shows the river emerging from the gorge at Lynmouth and is taken from Mars Hill. There is evidence of quarrying at the top of the valley to the right and cultivation high up the steep slopes, which are now cloaked with trees.





Figure 5.2.12 (Above): A view of *Watersmeet* produced by H. Hanhart in c.1840 shows the hotel, a popular site in the valley alongside the Lyn. The steep river valley sides are covered largely by trees, although the valley floor appears more open than today (**Figures 5.2.13 & 5.2.14 Below**).





Figures 5.2.15 (Above) of *Lynton* by George Rowe and **5.2.16 (Below)** W. Sprent, both c.1840s, provide extensive and detailed views of Lynton and Lynmouth showing their development in this spectacular coastal setting. Lithography allowed a high level of detail to be obtained, offering insight into the nature environment, agriculture and cultural heritage here in the mid-nineteenth century.





Figure 5.2.17 (Above) by William Daniell RA shows Lynmouth and the houses on Mars Hill in 1814. This view of the town was a favourite with artists since that time (see also **Figures 2.2-2.7** on page 13). **Figure 5.2.18 (Below)** was produced as a lithograph by George Rowe in the 1840s and show the increase in development on both sides of the river by that time. The hillsides are gradually being covered by tree growth.





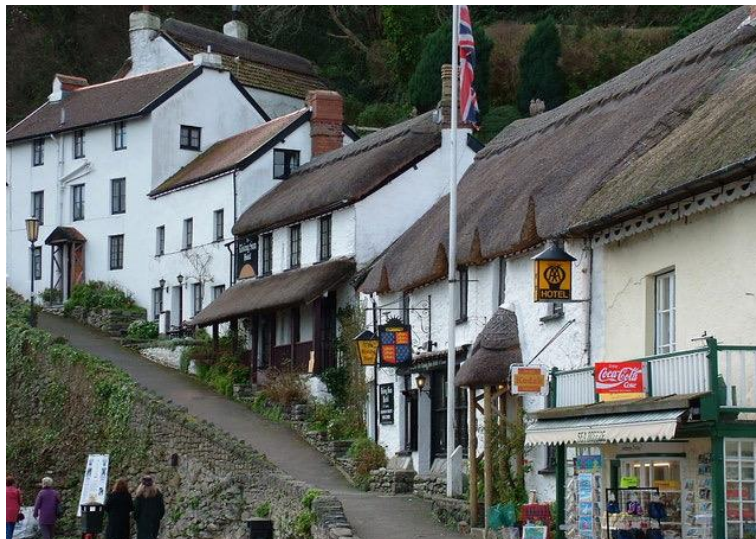
Figure 5.2.19 (Above): A fine lithograph of the imposing *Valley of the Rocks Hotel* at Lynton taken from the garden front and looking eastwards over Lynmouth to Countisbury Hill and to Foreland Point beyond. This popular Victorian Hotel, located next to Lynton Church, was extended and redesigned (see **Figure 5.2.20 Below**). The view today from the hotel over the coastline is equally dramatic (**Figure 5.2.21 Bottom**).

Sequences of such images over time can record and illustrate how historic buildings may have been altered over time and they can sometimes be the only record, in colour, of these structures.





The River Lyn



Mars Hill

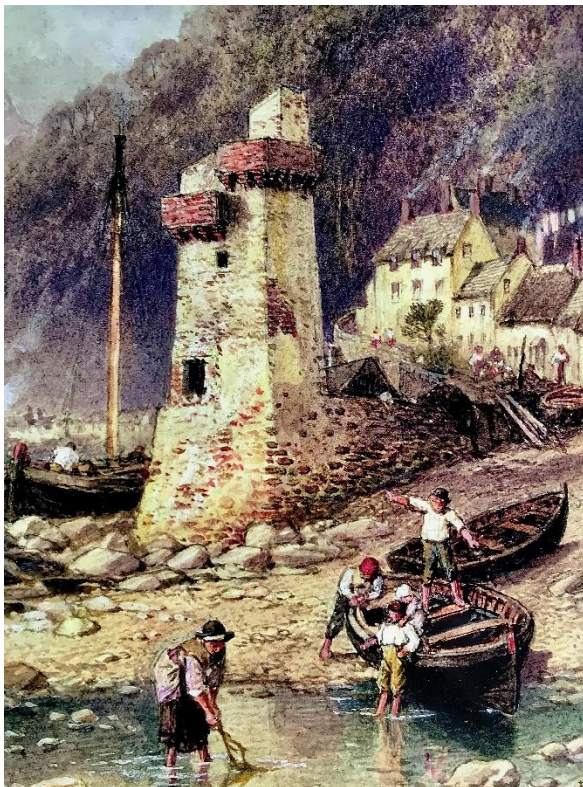


Figures 5.2.22-5.2.24 show Lynmouth today. Despite the devastating flood events of 1952 and 2012 the town retains much of its historic character such as the thatched cottages on Mars Hill (Centre). Many of the older buildings surrounding the waterfront are also visible in the fine lithograph by George Rowe, c.1840s (see **Figure 5.2.18** on page 63 Bottom).

Courtesy: Top: Rupert Fleeting/Geograph;
Left: Peter Levy/Geograph.



Figures 5.2.25-5.2.28 on this page show the shore and the Rhenish Tower, a prominent local landmark. **Figure 5.2.25 (Above):** *Lynmouth* by Albert Goodwin from the shore at low water in 1877. Courtesy: Chris Beetles Gallery, London. **Figure 5.2.26 (Below Left):** *At Lynmouth* by Myles Birket Foster, c.1880. Courtesy: Marshall Spink/Bridgeman. **Figure 5.2.27:** *Mars Hill, Lynmouth* by A. R. Quinton, c.1920. **Figure 5.2.28:** The Rhenish Tower – present day view.





Figures 5.2.29 (Above) & 5.2.30 (Left) show the row of picturesque cottages of the former Holnicote Estate at Selworthy near Porlock. The cottages are in the estate of the National Trust, which carefully maintains them.

Figure 5.2.31 (below) shows the view looking south from near Selworthy Church across the farmed and settled vale towards the high moors.





Figures 5.2.32 (Left) & 5.2.33 (Middle) show more picturesque cottages in the village of Luccombe, which was part of the Holnicote Estate, now in the ownership of the National Trust. The watercolour (left) was painted by the artist, Alfred Heaton Cooper, in 1927.



Figure 5.2.33: Cottages at Luccombe.

Courtesy: Roger Cornfoot/Geograph.

Figure 5.2.34 (Below): *Church of St Mary the virgin, Luccombe* by James Bulwer. c.1837. Watercolour.

Courtesy: Yale Center for British Art.





Figures 5.2.35 (Left): The rural village of Oare made famous in R. D. Blackmore's novel, *Lorna Doone*. This watercolour, painted in 1837, shows the field patterns and cultivation extending up the hillside to meet the edge of the high moors.

James Bulwer. 1837.

Courtesy: Yale Center for British Art.



Figure 5.2.36 (Left) shows the nature of the hillside behind the village today. The lower slopes are now increasingly covered by gorse.

Courtesy: Shutterstock Images.



Figure 5.2.37 (Left): A finely detailed watercolour of Oare Church painted in watercolour by James Bulwer in 1837.

Courtesy: Yale Center for British Art.



Figure 5.2.38 (Above): *Doone Glen* by Alfred Robert Quinton, painted in 1920. The river flows through one of the wildest valleys and is the largest headwater of the River Lyn. The countryside here is described by R. D. Blackmore in his famous novel *Lorna Doone*.

Image Courtesy: Salmon's.

Figure 5.2.39 (Below): A ford over *Badgworthy Water* showing the scenery today.

Image courtesy: Bill Broaden/Geograph.

