

5.3. Low Farmed Coast and Marsh

1. Location

This case study comprises the short coastal frontage of Porlock Bay near Minehead and extends from Porlock Weir in the west to Hurlstone Point in the east. The area is low-lying and is fed by the Horner Water, which flows north from the high ground to the south, emerging close to the shore to create an area of marsh, which is fronted by a substantial shingle shoreline. The village of Porlock lies at the back of the bay, whilst the harbour of Porlock Weir is 2 km to the west.

2. Why was the Case Study selected?

This case study is unique along the Exmoor National Park coastline in that it provides an example of a low-lying marsh and shingle shoreline, separated by steeply rising headlands to the west, to the east and hills to the south.

3. Summary of Geology, Geomorphology, Processes and Environment

The Porlock Vale is formed within the Mercia Mudstone and Penarth Groups of the Triassic Period. These younger rocks are covered by more recent fluvial deposits and are fronted by a shingle shoreline. The shingle ridge, which straddles the bay and has historically provided protection for property and assets behind, has proved increasingly difficult to maintain in recent years and the privately owned frontage, following storm events, introduced an adaptation strategy allowing nature to take its course. The breaching of the shingle bank has led to the creation of a new landscape that is unique to the National Park, with a significant expansion of the saltmarsh area and the creation of an important habitat both rich in maritime flora and an important habitat for breeding birds.

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

The main focus for artists in Porlock Bay has been the coastal frontage and, in particular, the lines of timber groynes that have long been such a dominant feature of the shoreline. The groynes appear rudimentary in the early nineteenth century but, by the 1850s, no doubt as a result of a clearer understanding of coastal processes and the need to provide improved levels of protection, these structures became more substantial and are illustrated in the magnificent oil painting by Edward William Cooke RA (**Figure 5.3.3 Below**). The mouth of the bay also features groynes supporting banks of cobbles in the painting by the Pre-Raphaelite Follower, Charles Napier Hemy (**Figure 5.3.4 Below**).

The watercolour drawing by Alfred Robert Quinton (**Figure 5.3.7 Below**), which was produced as a colour picture postcard, presents an extensive view over Porlock towards Hurlstone Point, looking across the bay. Much of the low-lying land appears to be extensively cultivated, although there is still a prominent beach visible particularly to the east. Scenic Porlock Weir was painted by the distinguished artist, Cecil Aldin, in 1921, as well as by A. R. Quinton in the 1920s and their works show the character villas lining the village; the hills behind are covered densely by tree growth. Alfred Heaton Cooper's view of Porlock Weir, painted in 1927, shows the approach to the village with whitewashed thatched cottages lining both sides of the road with the harbour beyond. Despite tourism pressures that exist during the summer at Porlock Weir and the necessity for car parking close to the harbour, the character of the area has been largely retained, the village being framed by the steeply rising wooded ground behind and the massive expanse of pink-grey shingle banks, through which access to the harbour is provided.

The attractive hamlets of Bossington and Allerford contain many cottages and other buildings of architectural interest that are well-preserved. The old Post Office at the bridge in Allerford and Piles Mill (**Figures 5.3.12-5.3.17 Below**), which dates from the sixteenth century, and the street at Bossington lined by cottages with a striking row of chimney stacks are particularly well-preserved.

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

The images of Porlock Bay contribute to our understanding of the management of coastal processes along this frontage through the nineteenth century, and the attempts to protect the coastal land from inundation by the sea. The artworks of Porlock Weir show how this small village has managed increasing numbers of visitors over time without loss of its distinctive architecture and character. Other artworks of hamlets in the vicinity, including Bossington and Allerford, demonstrate that the quality of cottage architecture has been carefully preserved.



Courtesy: Eton College Collections

Figure 5.3.1 (Above): *Porlock from the Inn Window* by Lady Susan Mackworth-Praed, a watercolour painted in 1830 showing thatched cottages close to the shore.

Figure 5.3.2 (Below): This late nineteenth century watercolour shows a view of the shore looking westwards and shows the system of timber pole groynes that were provided to control movement of the coarse beach material and provide further coastal defence. The groynes feature also in the two paintings illustrated as **Figures 5.3.3 and 5.3.4 overleaf**.

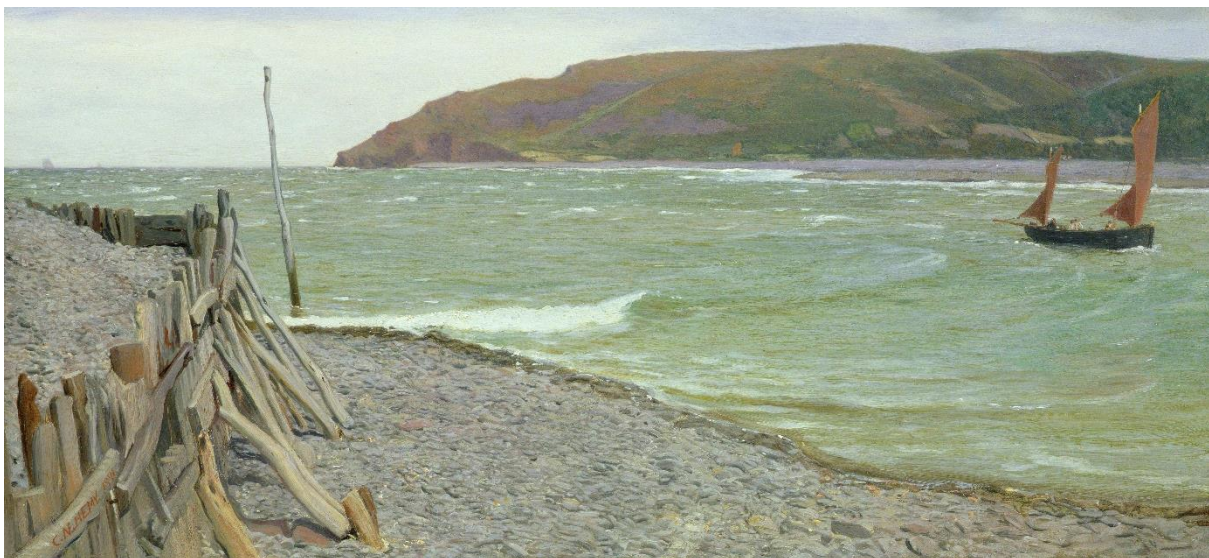


Courtesy: Royal Collection Trust © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2021



Courtesy: Martyn Gregory Gallery

Figure 5.3.3 (Above): *Porlock Weir* captured in Pre-Raphaelite detail by Edward William Cooke RA in 1862. **Figure 5.3.4 (Below)** shows a view looking across the Bay by Charles Napier Hemy, painted in oils in 1891. **Figure 5.3.5 (Bottom):** View looking across the Bay at Low Water.



Courtesy: Maas Gallery/Bridgeman Images



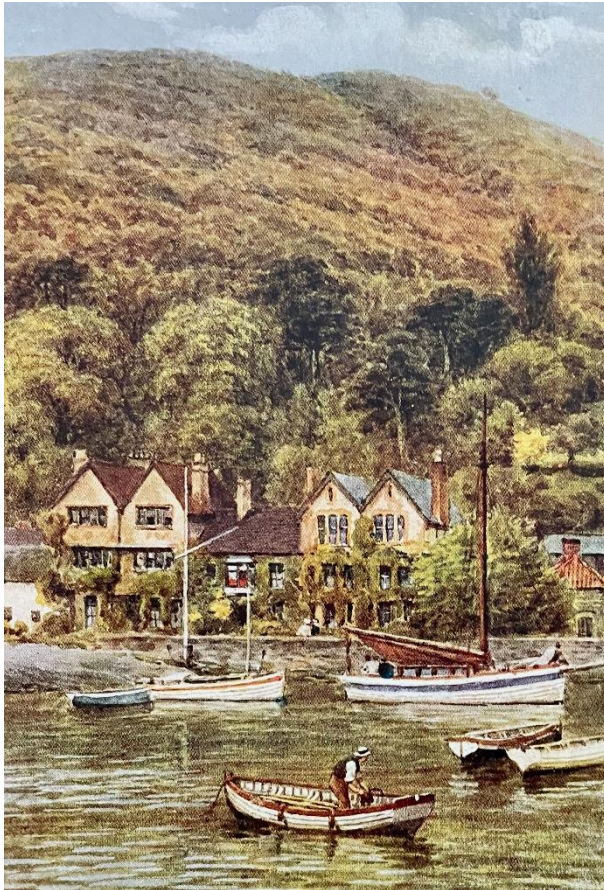
Courtesy: James Johnstone/Geograph



Figure 5.3.6 (Above): A panoramic view over Porlock Bay between Hurlstone Point and Porlock Weir on the coast of the Bristol Channel. The extensive shingle ridge shoreline is clearly visible together with its saltmarsh hinterland. A storm in October 1996 breached the shingle bank, which had previously formed a coastal defence, leading to inundation of the marshland behind. The National Trust subsequently adopted a 'managed realignment' approach to this frontage. The watercolour artist, A. R. Quinton, painted this view in c.1925. **Figure 5.3. 7 (Below):** The coastline has retreated since then and the coastal downlands are now more heavily wooded.

Images Courtesy: James Johnstone/Geograph (Above); Salmon's (Below).





Figures 5.3.8 (Left) & 5.3.9 (Above) show the small harbour at Porlock Weir set between the steeply rising hill behind and the Bristol Channel. Popular since Victorian times for its natural beauty, Porlock Weir retains its character with the handsome properties overlooking the harbour.

Image courtesy: Left: Salmon's (1926); Top: Kevin Pearson/Geograph.



Figures 5.3.10 (Left) & 5.3.11 (Bottom) show the attractive early properties in the village overlooking the sea, which also appear in **Figures 5.3.1 and 5.3.2.**

This watercolour was painted by Alfred Heaton Cooper in 1927.



Present day view of the harbour.

Image Courtesy: Peter Jeffery/Geograph.



Figures 5.3.12 (Above) & 5.3.13 (Right) show the picturesque old Post Office at Allerford near Porlock, which was painted for a colour picture postcard by A. R. Quinton in 1920. This attractive stone property and the bridge in front of it have been well maintained.

Image Courtesy: Salmon's.



Figures 5.3.14 (Left) & 5.3.15 (Bottom) again compare a Quinton watercolour of the village of Bossington near Porlock with the present-day view, and the scene has changed hardly at all over nearly a century. Forming part of the ancient Holnicote Estate many of these properties were gifted to the National Trust in 1934.

Image Courtesy: Salmon's.





Figure 5.3.16 (Above): This romantic style view of Piles Mill at Allerford was drawn by Francis Nicholson (1793-1844) and produced as a lithograph. **Figure 5.3.17 (Below):** The historic mill is shown below with its waterwheel restored. Sometimes early images of cultural heritage sites, such as the lithograph, can provide the only record of changes made to such buildings or their condition before demolition in the past.



Courtesy: Martin Bodman/Geograph

5.4. Open Moorland

1. Location

The Open Moorland case study comprises an extensive range of hills running west to east inland from the coastal zone, and more scattered areas of moorland in the central south of the National Park. The high ground of the moors offers far-reaching views across the National Park, including over the adjacent *Farmed Hills with Commons* to the north and to the south. The moorland is undeveloped, with virtually no habitation, the main land use having been for grazing and hunting over the centuries.

2. Why was the Case Study selected?

The open moorland occupies a substantial proportion of the National Park and through comparison of historical images with the present-day landscape it is possible to establish to what degree historical artworks can inform us of changes to such environments over time. Whilst open moorlands were less frequently painted than coastal scenery where artists' subjects were generally more marketable, there are, nevertheless, a number of images of the moors that provide useful indications of environment change that may have occurred, particularly over the last century.

3. Summary of Geology, Geomorphology, Processes and Environment

The open moorland has developed on the Hangman Sandstone Formation to the north and within the Pickwell Down Sandstone formation to the south; both these outcrops are of the Devonian Period. A particular feature of the high moors are the deep valleys, some of which are dry but others contain streams that eventually find their way into the watercourses that run northwards towards the Bristol Channel and south, particularly towards Dulverton and the valley of the Exe. The natural environment is one of heather, gorse, grassland and bog, with occasional trees, stone walls and hedges forming the only landmarks.

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

The art imagery of the open moorland is defined by the works of a small number of painters who specialised in depicting such scenery, including Frederick John Widgery, Charles Edward Brittan, the sporting artists Cecil Aldin, Lionel Edwards and Sir Alfred Munnings, and also views by Alfred Robert Quinton in the early twentieth century. Widgery and Brittan tended to paint wide open landscapes such as of Dunkery Beacon showing extensive heather-clad moors often captured in fine detail, whilst the works of Lionel Edwards and Munnings often featured the high Exmoor landscapes as backdrops to equestrian and hunting scenes. Munnings also painted numerous views of high Exmoor and the remote valleys and streams were amongst his favourite subjects. Detailed views of locations made famous by R. D. Blackmore in his book *Lorna Doone* (Blackmore, 1869¹), such as the Badgworthy stream in Doone Glen south of Lynton, provide a detailed appreciation of the landscape. Heritage features, such as Tarr Steps, an ancient crossing point of the River Barle, and Landacre Bridge, drawn by John L. W. Page in 1890, illustrate the bridge and the extent of the waterway at that time.

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

The case study has explored whether the use of historical artworks can provide information on landscape change in locations such as the high moorlands that form a dominant landscape feature within Exmoor National Park. The images depicted below show limited landscape change since they were painted in the nineteenth and early-to-mid twentieth centuries, mainly an increase in the extent of gorse and small trees replacing heather.

6. References

1. Blackmore, R. D. 1869. *Lorna Doone*. Sampson Low, Son & Marston.



Figure 5.4.1 (Above): The remoteness and beauty of the High Moorland of the Exmoor National Park attracted certain key artists during the nineteenth century, including Frederick J. Widgey, who painted this view of *Dunkery Beacon*, and Charles Edward Brittan (1870-1949). Their numerous and often highly detailed watercolours show the extent of the heather and open aspects, which in some locations are becoming over-run by gorse and the growth of small trees.

Courtesy: © Bonham's/Bridgeman Images.

Figure 5.4.2 (Below) shows a distant view of Dunkery Beacon and its sharp profile against the skyline from the south.





Figure 5.4.3: *Withypool Hill, Exmoor*. Oil.

Sir Alfred Munnings (1878-1959) painted numerous views of Exmoor scenery while living there during the Second World War.

Often depicting equestrian scenes in oils, the grandeur and general landscape character of the high moorland is illustrated through his works. All of these works illustrated: Courtesy of © the Estate of Sir Alfred Munnings, Essex/Munnings Museum.



Figure 5.4.4: *Mill Hill, Oar*. Oil.



Figure 5.4.5: *An Extensive view of Exmoor*. Oil.



Figure 5.4.6: *An Exmoor Stream*. Oil.



Figure 5.4.7 (Above): The artist Lionel Edwards (1878-1966) painted equestrian and field sports subjects, including many views of Exmoor. His artworks often illustrate the nature of the landscape at that time, such as this view of *The Devon and Somerset Staghounds coming out of the Danesbrook* in 1963.

Courtesy: Dominic Winter Book Auctions.

Figure 5.4.8 (Below) shows a similar present-day view from the open high moorland looking across to the farmed hills beyond. Small trees, scrub and gorse are starting to encroach within the traditional heather moors in some locations.





Figure 5.4.9 (Above) shows a watercolour by the artist 'Jotter' (Walter Haywood-Young) painted in about 1910 at *Webber's Post* on the Holnicote Estate with views towards Dunkery Beacon. In the ownership of the National Trust the present-day photograph (**Figure 5.4.10 Below**) shows some extension of tree cover but, overall, a very similar landscape to that of Jotter's view.

Image courtesy: Lewis Clarke/Geograph.



5.5. Farmed and Settled Vale

1. Location

The case study extends south-east from the village of Porlock and includes a number of small villages, together with the important historic town of Dunster, which is famous for its majestically located castle. The landscape is devoted mainly to agriculture but also includes woodlands and meadows, some of which are crossed by streams flowing into the larger watercourses downstream.

2. Why was the Case Study selected?

This site contrasts with extensive plantation land bordering it to the east, the high moors to the south, and the low-lying land of Porlock Bay to the north. The case study site has a rich architectural heritage and numerous Listed Buildings, including Dunster Castle, which also has an historic park and garden. The study site is also characterised by use of local reddish brown building stone, which provides a distinctive character to the cottages and farm buildings within the area, whilst, elsewhere, the estate properties are rendered and painted in pastel tones. The landscapes of the larger estates continue to influence the landscape through their management for recreation, such as shooting and hunting, as well as for farming.

3. Summary of Geology, Geomorphology, Processes and Environment

The case study lies within mudstone formations of the Devonian Period, which lie beneath more recent fluvial deposits in the river valleys. The elevation falls from some 250 m inland down to a more low-lying coastal plain, which is dominated by the two main rivers, the Avill and the Horner Water. Run-off from the higher land to the south-west has caused serious flooding in the past and has necessitated a range of flood management initiatives. The natural environment includes important ancient woodlands alongside more traditional agriculture and historic landscapes such as those surrounding Dunster Castle.

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

Art imagery within this case study is almost exclusively confined to views of Dunster Castle and the town of Dunster or wider landscapes but, again, with the focus on the castle and its setting. An extensive view, looking east from the high ground, over Dunster Castle and along the coastline, was lithographed by R. Pocock in about 1840, whilst the Reverend John Swete produced several views of the castle in watercolour as part of his tour in 1796; these are illustrated below. They show the castle in its parkland and wooded setting very clearly. The most popular view of Dunster itself is that showing the village centre, with its famous Yarn Market and the castle beyond; this was lithographed by an unknown artist in about 1840. A similar vantage point was chosen by the watercolourist, Walter Frederick Tyndale, in about 1920. The views by Reverend Swete in the late eighteenth century and R. Pocock in the mid-nineteenth century show the nature of the parkland, which can be compared with present-day photographs, whilst views of the town of Dunster itself offer an immediate comparison in terms of the carefully preserved architectural heritage of the town centre.

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

The key artistic focus within this case study area is Dunster Castle and environs, particularly the castle in its parkland setting and the adjacent countryside. A fine range of images are also available showing the town of Dunster and its architectural heritage, including the Conservation area. The castle and its setting have been carefully preserved and show relatively little change.



Figure 5.5.1: The Dunster Castle Estate lies within the *Farmed and Settled Vale* Landscape Character Type and the Rev. John Swete painted watercolour views here on his visit to North Devon in 1796. These views show the setting of the Castle and estate buildings within their landscaped parkland of elm trees. The rising land behind the castle (see **Figure 5.5.2 Below**) was later planted extensively with conifers.

Images Courtesy: Devon Archives & Local Studies 2021.





Figure 5.5.3 (Top) shows the River Avill flowing through its parkland floodplain towards the Bristol Channel – a further precise watercolour by Rev. Swete (1796). Image courtesy: Devon Archives & Local Studies 2021.



Figure 5.5.4 (Middle): James Bulwer also painted Dunster Castle on his tour in 1837, again showing the open hillside behind the castle. Courtesy: Yale Center for British Art.

Figure 5.5.5 (Bottom) shows the present-day view. Image courtesy: Richard Baker/Geograph.





Figure 5.5.6: This lithograph by R. Pocock, c.1840, shows an extensive view over Dunster Castle and the town to the coast beyond. **Figure 5.5.7 (Below)** is also taken from above the castle where the hillsides have been planted with coniferous species.





Figure 5.5.8: Courtesy: Devon Archives & Local Studies 2021



Figure 5.5.9: Courtesy: Guy Peppiatt Fine Art.



Figure 5.5.10: Courtesy: Mike Crowe/Geograph

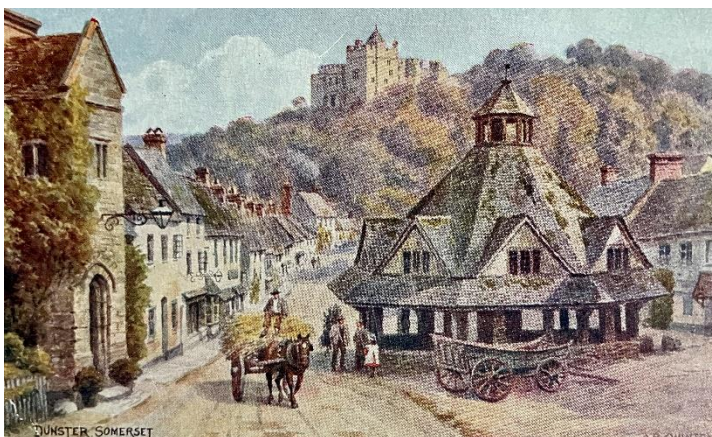
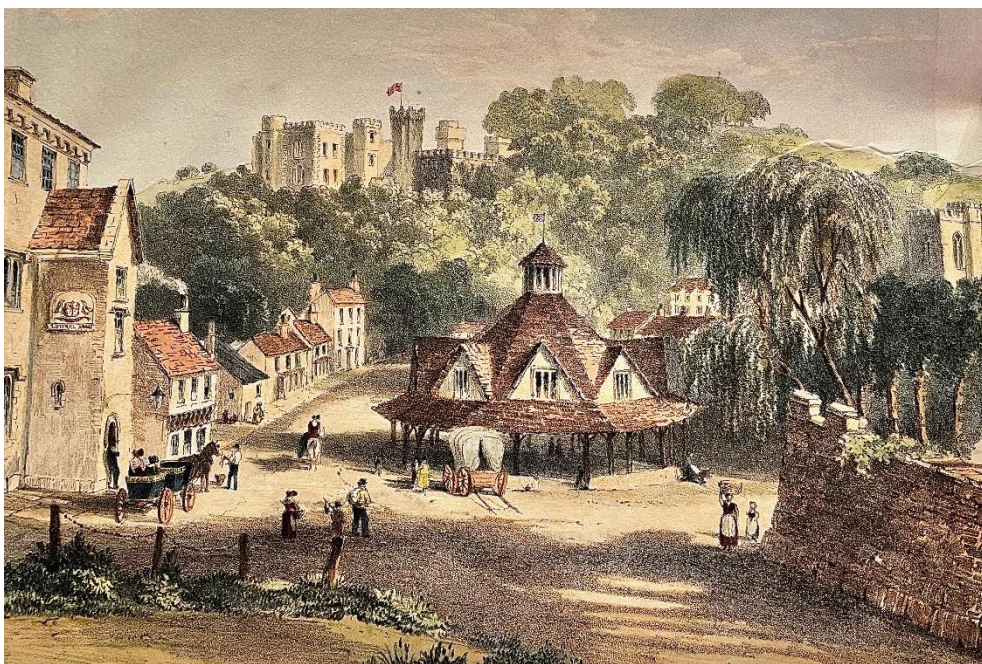
Figures 5.5.8-5.5.12 show depictions of Dunster Castle from the town over time. **Figure 5.5.8** was painted from the hotel window in 1796, whilst **Figure 5.5.9** was produced in watercolour by the prolific topographical watercolourist, William Callow. The present-day view (**Figure 5.5.10**) appears to have changed little over time. Alfred Robert Quinton painted the castle main front in c.1920 for Salmon's postcards (**Figure 5.5.11**).



Figure 5.5.11: Courtesy: Salmon's



Figure 5.5.12: Courtesy: Richard Croft/Geograph



Figures 5.5.13 (Top): The town centre and Yarn Market by James Bulwer in c.1837. Courtesy: Yale Center for British Art. **Figure 5.5.14 (Middle):** A lithograph of the same location by E. V. C. 1840s. **Figure 5.5.15 (Bottom):** A. R. Quinton's watercolour c.1920. Courtesy: Salmon's.

Very little change or heritage loss or damage can be seen over 150 years.