

## Trading town



A self-guided walk around Bideford, north Devon

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Cover image: Bideford Long Bridge © Mike Jackson RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

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# Trading town

## Discover Bideford's seafaring heritage

The small but attractive town of Bideford in North Devon became famous in the Victorian era as the 'little white town' of Charles Kingsley's novel, 'Westward Ho!'.

But this North Devon port by the River Torridge has a rich and much older maritime heritage. In fact, Bideford was once one of the great ports of England.

Its success can be attributed to a combination of its geographical location, a great Elizabethan adventurer and some entrepreneurial merchants.

On the walk you will find out about some of these people and the trades that they were involved in from cod and clay to pottery and pipes. There are also stories of sailors and smugglers, death and disease.



This walk has been written to complement the town's excellent Heritage Trail by highlighting how Bideford both influenced and was influenced by different countries around the world.

It was originally created in 2012 as part of a series that explored how our towns and cities have been shaped by some of the 206 participating nations in the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

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## Practical information

<b>Location</b>	Bideford, North Devon
<b>Getting there</b>	<p><b>Car</b> - Bideford is just off the A39 (Atlantic Highway). From the A39 follow the signs for Bideford town centre. This takes you along Heywood Road and Kingsley Road (A386).</p> <p>There is a range of short stay and long stay parking available in the town but we recommend parking at Riverbank car park which lies between Victoria Park and the River Torridge. Access is from the corner of Kingsley Road and The Quay which is the start point of the walk. Parking charges apply.</p> <p><b>Train</b> - The nearest mainline station is Barnstaple (7 ½ miles away) which is served by hourly services from Exeter St Davids.</p> <p><b>Bus</b> - Bideford is well served by local buses including a regular service from Barnstaple railway station; alight on The Quay.</p> <p><b>Bicycle</b> - National Cycle Route 27 (The Tarka Trail) runs through Bideford</p>
<b>Start point</b>	Statue of Charles Kingsley, north end of The Quay
<b>Finish point</b>	Bandstand in Victoria Park, north end of The Quay
<b>Distance</b>	Just under 1 ½ miles
<b>Terrain</b>	Pavements and streets around the town
<b>Level</b>	<b>Moderate</b> - There are some steep slopes and steps
<b>Suitable for</b>	<p><b>Families</b> - Take care of young children by the quayside</p> <p><b>Wheelchairs</b> - Although there are some steep slopes, a step-free route is available</p>
<b>Toilets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Victoria Park (near start and end of route) - with disabled access and baby changing</li><li>- The Quay (Stops 2 and 3) - with disabled access and baby changing</li><li>- Pannier Market (Stop 9)</li></ul>

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### **Refreshments**

There are plenty of cafes, restaurants and pubs in the town including:

- Cafe du Parc, Victoria Park (near start and end of route)
- Quayside Cafe, 22 The Quay (near Stop 2 and Stop 15)
- The Rose of Torridge (Stop 4)
- The Market Cafe, Pannier Market (Stop 9)

Also look out for Hockings ice cream vans for excellent locally-made ice cream.

### **Places to visit**

#### **Burton Art Gallery & Museum**

Kingsley Road, Bideford EX39 2QQ  
Excellent displays on the town's history.  
Open 7 days a week all year round  
Admission free  
[www.burtonartgallery.co.uk](http://www.burtonartgallery.co.uk)

### **Tourist information**

Bideford Tourist Information Centre  
Located on the edge of Victoria Park within the Burton Art Gallery & Museum (see above)  
Telephone: 01237 477 676 and 01237 421853  
Email: [bidefordtic@torridge.gov.uk](mailto:bidefordtic@torridge.gov.uk)

Visit North Devon and Exmoor  
[www.northdevon.com](http://www.northdevon.com)



Boats moored at Bideford Quay with the new bridge over the Torridge behind  
© Mike Jackson

## Route map



### Stopping points

- S** Statue of Charles Kingsley, north end of The Quay
- 2.** Half way along The Quay
- 3.** Half way along The Quay
- 4.** Rose of Torr ridge, The Quay
- 5.** Corner of Allhalland St and Chapel St
- 6.** Corner of Allhalland St and Bridge St
- 7.** St Mary's Church
- 8.** 12 and 13 Butt garden St
- 9.** Pannier Market, Grenville St
- 10.** King St
- 11.** Bottom of Cooper St
- 12.** 26 Bridgeland St
- 13.** Willet St
- 14.** Rope Walk
- 15.** Old Custom House, The Quay
- F** Bandstand, Victoria Park

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## 1. Welcome to Bideford

### Statue of Charles Kingsley, north end of The Quay

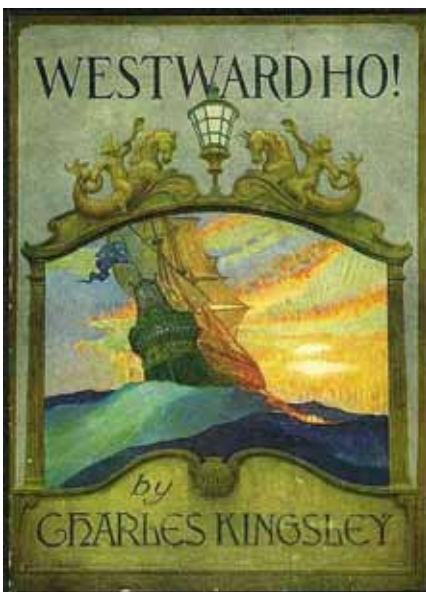
We begin at the statue of Victorian writer, Charles Kingsley, who was born in Devon in 1819. Like his father he was a clergyman; his mother came from a line of Barbadian sugar plantation owners.

Kingsley became a prolific novelist and was also a professor of history and a social reformer; both are reflected in his writings. His best-known work is 'The Water Babies' but this statue was built here because of the popularity of another of his books, 'Westward Ho!'

It tells of the adventures of a young man from Bideford who follows the sixteenth-century explorer Sir Francis Drake to sea. It is a tale of adventure about the 'Spanish Main', South America and 'The Inquisition'.



Statue of Charles Kingsley on Bideford Quay  
© Mike Jackson



Cover of Westward Ho! (1920 edition)  
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Kingsley dedicated the book to James Brooke, the first White Rajah of Sarawak (part of present-day Malaysia) and George Selwyn, the first Anglican Bishop of New Zealand.

In the first sentence of 'Westward Ho!' Kingsley describes Bideford as "the little white town, which slopes upwards from its broad tide-river paved with yellow sands, and many-arched old bridge".

The book was very popular and large numbers of tourists came to visit where it was set. In 1863 a company was formed by local entrepreneurs with the express purpose of creating a seaside resort in the area described in Kingsley's book. And what better name than the title of the book itself? Thus the nearby resort of Westward Ho! was born. It is the only town in Britain to have an exclamation mark in its name. It shares this distinction with Saint-Louis-du-Ha! Ha! in Quebec, which has two!

#### Directions 1

Go across the car park access road to the riverside. Turn right and walk along The Quay with the water on your left. Stop half way along The Quay at the Lundy Ferry building.

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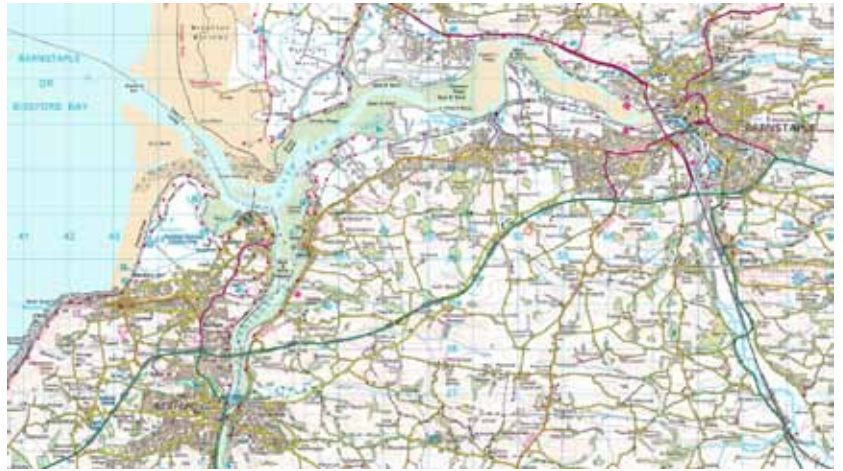
## 2. Stone arches

### Half way along The Quay

This is the River Torridge. It rises in northwest Devon on the Woolley Moors then flows in a long loop through Devon farming countryside.

Here at Bideford it is just a few miles from its confluence with the River Taw, which flows through Barnstaple. The wide Taw-Torridge estuary then opens out into the Bristol Channel.

As the river is nearing the sea at this point, it is quite wide. But humans have long since needed to cross it.



The Taw-Torridge estuary  
© Ordnance Survey

There was once a ford here, a shallow point that could be crossed on foot or horseback. This ford gave the town its name: Bideford derives from By-the-Ford. To save wet feet, there has been a bridge here for many centuries. The attractive Long Bridge that you can see just upstream has spanned the river for over 700 years.



Long Bridge  
© Mike Jackson

The stone bridge is 190 metres long and has 24 arches. Look carefully and you will see that the arches are different widths.

It was constructed in the fifteenth century by encasing an older wooden bridge in stone and the arches probably reflect the widths of the original timber spans.

Look the opposite way, downstream, and you can see the new Bideford Bridge built in 1989 to carry the bypass road. It is considerably higher than the old bridge and crosses the Torridge in just eight spans.

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#### Directions 2

Remain in the same place on The Quay.



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### 3. Tidal trade

#### Half way along The Quay

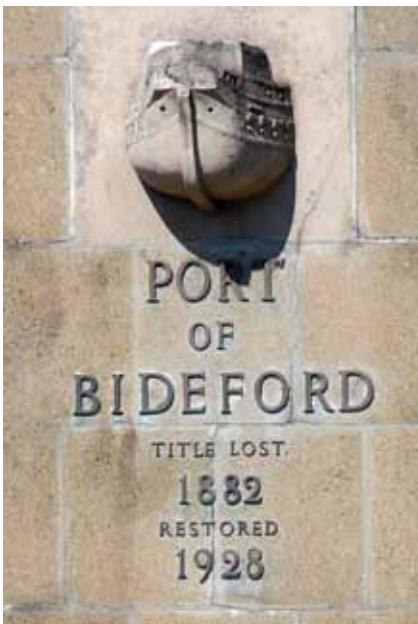
Bideford was in an ideal position to develop as a trading port. This sheltered stretch of river is just three miles from the Bristol Channel. This straight section of riverbank was the main quay. Originally, boats would have grounded on the sloping bed of the river but this was tide-dependent and limited what and when goods could be loaded and unloaded.

To solve the problem this quay was built in 1663. Over the years it has been raised, widened and lengthened.



Bideford Quay with the Long Bridge in the distance  
© Mike Jackson

Ships arrive and depart on the high tide. Because the Bristol Channel has the second highest tidal range in the world Bideford can take vessels with up to five metres draught on spring tides.



The Port of Bideford  
© Mike Jackson

Goods from around the world have been transported here to Bideford Quay. One of the town's early trades was importing wool from Spain and Ireland; later there was a significant fishing and tobacco trade that we will find out about later. In addition, pottery was sent to Ireland and the United States, oak bark sent to tanneries in Ireland and Scotland, and timber imported from Canada for shipbuilding.

Bideford still operates as a port and you may see cargo ships moored here. Shipping is an international business and ships regularly leave Bideford destined for Spain or Finland with cargoes of clay. Devon is one of the few places in the world with deposits of fine plastic 'ball clay'. This is very valuable in pottery making and over 80 per cent of the ball clay extracted in Devon today is exported. Ships also leave Bideford loaded with spruce logs for Wismar in Germany.

#### Directions 3

Continue along The Quay towards the Long Bridge. After about 100 metres use the traffic island to cross the main road. Stop outside a fish restaurant called The Rose of Torrridge.

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## 4. Cod and ships

### The Rose of Torridge, The Quay

The Rose of Torridge, named after Rose Salterne, the heroine in Charles Kingsley's 'Westward Ho!', was originally a pub and one of four along The Quay. It later became the Newfoundland Hotel and it is now a fish restaurant. Both these later uses hint at Bideford's fishing trade.

At the end of the fifteenth century the Italian navigator John Cabot discovered the great cod fishery known as the Grand Banks off Newfoundland in eastern Canada.

Fishermen from Portugal, France and Spain were quick to exploit it. They had cheap supplies of salt which they used to process and cure their catch while still at sea.

The lack of a ready supply of salt put English fishermen at a disadvantage. They resorted to drying and lightly salting fish on the shore. However, after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, Spanish and Portuguese fishing declined. Their trade was taken up by the English and cod became the foundation of Bideford's wealth.



The Rose of Torridge  
© Mike Jackson



Fish and chips on The Quay  
© Mike Jackson

A triangular trade developed with fishing gear, clothes and provisions taken from Devon to Newfoundland; from there dried cod was shipped to European ports in Italy and Spain; in turn their products such as olive oil, wine and dried fruit were brought back to England.

Salt cod influenced the cuisine of many countries around the Atlantic. In Portugal it is known as 'bacalhau' which is eaten on special days. It is also the basis of the Jamaican national dish, 'ackee' and saltfish. You can order cod and chips at the Rose of Torridge but you will have to add your own salt!

#### Directions 4

Take the narrow passage between the Rose of Torridge and the Kings Arms which is called Conduit Lane. At the end turn left into Allhalland Street. Stop after a few metres by the passageway into Chapel Street on the right.

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## 5. Refugees

### Corner of Allhalland Street and Chapel Street

Before the quay was extended, the gardens of the houses on the east side of Allhalland Street stretched down to the river. Thus this narrow street was the main thoroughfare from the bridge to the High Street.

Under the arch is a small cul-de-sac called Chapel Street. A French Huguenot congregation was set up in Bideford in 1695 and this lane lead to their church.



Chapel Street  
© Mike Jackson

The Huguenots were French Protestants inspired by John Calvin in the sixteenth century.



The Great London Mosque in Brick Lane, East London was originally built as a Huguenot chapel for French refugees  
ceridwen, Geograph (CCL)

They suffered religious persecution which caused about 200,000 of them to leave France. They settled in non-Catholic European countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark and even Russia. Many went to settle in the colonies on the east coast of America; meanwhile the Dutch East India Company sent a few hundred to the Cape to develop the vineyards in South Africa.

An estimated 50,000 Huguenots came to England with perhaps 10,000 later moving on to Ireland. They settled in London and across the south and west of England. They were the first group of people to be called refugees – the word comes from the French ‘refugier’ which means to take shelter. The Huguenots brought skills with them, in particular silk and cloth weaving, lace making and tapestry.

The famous English diarist Samuel Pepys may once have visited Bideford. He married Elisabeth de St Michel who was born here and was the daughter of a Huguenot exile.

#### Directions 5

Continue to the end of Allhalland Street. Stop at the junction with Bridge Street and look across the road at the ornate redbrick building which is the Town Hall.

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## 6. Grenville's legacy

### Corner of Alhalland Street and Bridge Street

This ornate redbrick building is the Town Hall, built in Tudor style to commemorate the Elizabethan era when Bideford grew into a major port. Here is also where Bideford's most famous and influential resident, Sir Richard Grenville, is thought to have had a town house.

Bideford was a small fishing town until the sixteenth century when Grenville obtained a new charter that gave Bideford borough status.

Grenville was a great adventurer and went to Hungary to fight the Turks. He later fought in Ireland where he owned an estate with his father-in-law.



Sir Richard Grenville  
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)



Map of the east coast of  
North America by John  
White (1585)  
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

But it was Grenville's involvement in America which was to have the biggest impact on Bideford. Grenville's cousin, Walter Raleigh, had obtained a charter from Queen Elizabeth I to colonise North America.

On Raleigh's behalf, Grenville sailed to Virginia where he established a small garrison on Roanoke Island in modern-day North Carolina. A year later he returned with supplies only to find the men had gone.

Sir Francis Drake had stopped by on his return from a voyage to South America just a few days earlier and the men had decided to return to England with him. Grenville left another 15 men to keep a claim to a colony alive but when merchant John White arrived the following year he found no trace of them.

Nevertheless White left around 115 settlers on Roanoke to form a colony. Grenville prepared to send supply ships but these were requisitioned to fight the Spanish Armada. It was three years before anyone returned to Virginia and there was no sign of the 'Lost colony of Roanoke'.

Grenville went on to command the ship 'Revenge' which plundered Spanish treasure ships off the Azores. He was wounded in a gallant fight at the Battle of Flores and died a few days later.

#### Directions 6

Go straight across Bridge Street into Church Walk. Go through the gates of St Mary's Church and up to the main door.

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## 7. Death and disease

### St Mary's Church

The tower of St Mary's Church dates back to the thirteenth century but the rest of what you see today was rebuilt by Bideford's wealthy merchants in the 1860s.

Just outside the main door and inside the porch you will see records of a Native American of the Wynganditoian tribe. He was brought to Bideford by Sir Richard Grenville who named him Raleigh after his cousin and adventurer. Sadly the man died of a cold the following year.

Trading ports where people and goods come and go have always been hubs for disease. For example, plague came to Bideford in 1646 most probably in a wool cargo from Spain and records show that 229 people were buried here in the space of just six months.

Inside is the tomb of Richard Grenville's great grandfather and monuments to many of Bideford's merchants. These include John Strange who helped the town during the plague before succumbing himself.



St Mary's Church  
© Mike Jackson



Memorial to John Strange, plague victim  
© Mike Jackson

#### Directions 7

With your back to the church door, turn left and go up the steps to the top gate of the churchyard. Continue straight ahead up the narrow lane (Tower Street). At the top of the steps turn left into Buttgarden Street. Stop outside numbers 12 and 13 on the right.

**For a step free route** - Go back to the church gates onto Church Walk. At the junction with Bridge Street turn left up the hill. At the top turn left into Grenville Street which immediately becomes Buttgarden Street.

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## 8. Tobacco traders

### 12 and 13 Buttgarden Street

Buttgarden Street dates from 1670 when Bideford had a large tobacco trade with the settlers who had followed Richard Grenville to Virginia in America.

The quayside was too damp to store tobacco so these buildings were used as tobacco warehouses.

Tobacco smoking came to Europe after Christopher Columbus discovered it in Cuba in 1492. Sir Walter Raleigh is said to have taken up smoking and popularised it within the Elizabethan Court in the 1590s.



Former tobacco warehouse on Buttgarden Street  
© Mike Jackson

The settlers in Virginia soon discovered that tobacco would grow well and they found a ready market for it in England. Tobacco soon became a key cash crop and a mainstay of the economy of the Southern States.

In the first half of the seventeenth century Bideford merchants imported more tobacco in their ships than any other port in England except London. Over the 10 years to 1731 nearly eight and a half million pounds of tobacco landed at Bideford Quay. Great quantities were re-exported to European countries, particularly the Netherlands but also to Ireland, Norway, Spain and Germany.



Tobacco growing on a Virginia plantation  
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Port records give us some idea of the goods sent back to Virginia in return. A ship called the 'Dove' owned by Bideford merchant Thomas Smith arrived in June 1714 from Virginia with a cargo of tobacco. It returned in November with mixed merchandise that included rugs, hats, stockings, textiles, haberdashery, books, paper, shoes, nails, ironmongery, wrought pewter, brass work, wool cards, leather chairs, a chest of drawers and even a looking glass.

Today the United States is still a major tobacco producer but the biggest growers are now China, India and Brazil.

#### Directions 8

Retrace your steps along Buttgarden Street. Stop at the first main junction where you will see a single-storey stone and brick building diagonally opposite. This is the Pannier Market.

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## 9. A basket of goods

### Pannier Market, Grenville Street

A market has been held in Bideford since the granting of the Charter of Incorporation in 1573. It was originally held at the bottom of the High Street but moved here when the quay got too busy.

This building was opened in 1884 at a time when many towns were constructing indoor markets. You may have come across the name 'Pannier Market' elsewhere as they are found in many Devon and Somerset towns. The name comes from the French word 'pannier' which means a basket and recalls the way in which farmers' wives carried their wares to the market.



Pannier Market  
© Mike Jackson

This market housed the fish market, butchery stalls and corn exchange. Since being beautifully restored in 1993 it is home to traditional stalls as well as art and craft shops.



Colourful stalls of local produce inside the Pannier Market  
© Mike Jackson

#### Directions 9

Continue along Grenville Street (with the market on your left) and go straight across at the next junction down the hill. At the bottom turn right into High Street. When you reach The Quay turn left and immediately left again into a narrow lane called King Street. Stop at the bend in the lane.

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## 10. Lofty sails

### King Street

King Street and Queen Street are narrow streets that mark the edge of an earlier quay. The large windows, doors and entrances of the buildings we can see here would have originally looked out onto the river.

You can also see some stone buildings that were once warehouses. Their lofts would have been used to store and repair sails for ships.



'Scene at Bideford Bridge' by Mark Myers, showing the crowded waters of the Torridge during the heyday of colonial trade  
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

#### Directions 10

Continue along King Street. Stop at the end and look left up Cooper Street.



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## 11. Hogsheads

### Bottom of Cooper Street

This is Cooper Street where barrels were once made. The word 'cooper' means barrel maker – a word that comes from the Dutch 'cuper' meaning a cask. You probably know someone with the surname Cooper which derives from the trade of making barrels.

Barrels have been used for centuries to transport goods. The Greeks and Romans originally carried goods in pottery amphora. The Gauls are sometimes credited with developing barrels but it was the Romans that adopted them and put them to widespread use.



Cooper Street  
© Mike Jackson



'Cooper Tightening Staves on a Barrel'  
by Jean-Francois Millet (c1848-52)  
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Barrels were the most convenient shipping container for almost 2,000 years. On long sea voyages barrels would have been used to hold drinking water, beer, wine and spirits as well as provisions such as dried peas, flour, salt meat and fish.

Some of the wooden barrels made here would also have been used for transporting and storing tobacco because they were watertight. These large barrels were called Hogsheads and weighed up to 1,000 pounds when filled.

It was not until the twentieth century when pallets and containers appeared that barrels declined in importance. Wooden barrels are still used in wine and spirit making, while wooden barrels and metal casks are used to transport beer.

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#### Directions 11

Continue straight on with the small square on your right and into Queen Street. At the end turn left into Bridgeland Street. Stop by Number 26 on the left side.

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## 12. Wealth of nations

### 26 Bridgeland Street

As you can see, Bridgeland Street is quite wide in comparison to some of the narrow lanes that we have walked along.

It also has some grand houses which were built after the quay was extended in the 1690s.

These were the homes of the wealthiest merchants of Bideford who had capitalised on connections with the American colonies.

As well as their houses here in Bideford, some Bideford merchants acquired land in the New World.



Merchant's mansion on Bridgeland Street  
© Mike Jackson

New colonists were entitled to 50 acres of land each so by offering people free passage in exchange for their land entitlement, Bideford merchants were able to develop great estates in the New World.

Some merchants tried to maximise their wealth by avoiding tax. For example look closely at Number 26 and you will see that it is faced with red tiles that look like red bricks. This was to avoid paying the 'brick tax' which was introduced in 1784. Higher up the street look out an example of bricked up windows which was a way to avoid the 'window tax'.



Avoiding brick tax and window tax on Bridgeland Street  
© Mike Jackson

#### Directions 12

Continue along Bridgeland Street past the church. At the junction turn right and immediately right again into Willet Street. Stop at the bend in Willet Street.

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## 13. Pots and pipes

### Willet Street

In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries pottery was one of Bideford's most important industries. Unfortunately there is no sign today on Willet Street of the potteries that once stood here.

Devon clay is prized because it is extremely fine and plastic plus it becomes white with firing. It is called 'ball clay' because it is extracted by cutting the clay into cubes but with handling it quickly takes on the shape of a ball.

There were 20 or 30 kilns in the town and a huge pottery trade with Ireland where Bideford had strong links through Sir Richard Grenville who was also the Sheriff of Cork.



Devon pottery in Burton Museum and Gallery  
© Mike Jackson

Most of the pottery produced in Bideford was plain earthenware such as jars, pots and jugs. Devon is also known for its 'sgraffito' ware created when a slip of white clay is applied and then scratched off to make decorative pictures and patterns.



Devon clay pipes in Burton Museum and Gallery  
© Mike Jackson

After Sir Walter Raleigh made pipe smoking fashionable, ball clay was found to be the ideal material for making pipes. Tobacco was expensive to start with so only small quantities were smoked in small pipes with short stems. Later, as more tobacco was imported into Britain, it became cheaper and pipe bowls became larger. Stems also became longer to cool the hot smoke.

Pottery was also sent from Bideford to the New World as ballast on the tobacco ships.

#### Directions 13

Continue along Willet Street. At the end turn right into The Strand which soon after becomes narrow and changes its name to Rope Walk. Stop by the large brick warehouse on the right side called Blackmore's Depository.

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## 14. Twisted straight

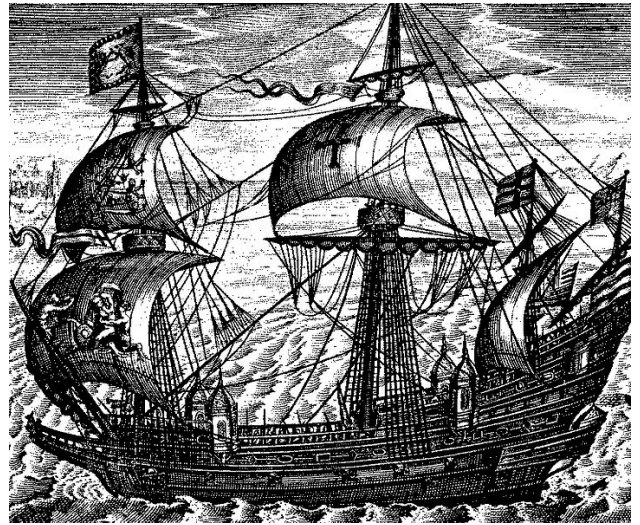
### Rope Walk

This long and narrow street is called Rope Walk and its name gives a clue as to what was once made here.

String ropes have been claimed to be one of the most important human inventions because they were used for so many practical tasks.

In Elizabethan times a great deal of rope was needed for the rigging, mooring and anchoring of sailing ships.

In those times rope was made from hemp which has soft, durable plant fibres. Some hemp was grown in Britain but it was also imported from Egypt, Riga in Latvia and the Netherlands.



Ark Royal (1587)  
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)



Rope at Bideford Quay  
© Mike Jackson

Later other natural fibres such as cotton, linen, coconut-husk fibre (coir), jute, and sisal were imported from as far away as Kenya, India and the Philippines.

Rope Walks such as this were developed where yarns and twines were stretched out between revolving hooks.

The hooks needed to be as much as 1,000 feet apart - hence the long straight street. These hooks twisted the yarns together in increasing numbers to obtain the required thickness.

You can find streets called Rope Walk in port towns and cities across Britain including Liverpool, Plymouth, Chatham, Rye and Littlehampton.

#### Directions 14

Continue along Rope Walk which leads back to The Quay. At the end on the right side is the Old Custom House, now a pub. Stop outside.

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## 15. Anything to declare?

### Old Custom House, The Quay

This lively Irish bar occupies a building that used to be Bideford's Custom House. It dates back to 1695 and as the name suggests this was the office for checking the import and export of goods.

You are probably familiar with today's customs clearance process at airports and choosing whether to pass through the green or red channels.

But the collection of customs duties from sailing ships in the past was far more haphazard and bureaucratic. Imagine customs officers rowing out to meet sailing ships to check their cargo and look for contraband.



Old Custom House pub sign  
© Mike Jackson

British customs duties and other taxes became especially unpopular in the colonies. In 1773 tax revolts in Boston led to the American War of Independence. Taxes also encouraged the growth of smuggling which became rife in Devon and Cornwall. Coastal traders made good profits by collecting small packages from French ships offshore and landing them on the beaches.



Lundy Island, seen from Capstone Hill, Ilfracombe  
Sarah Charlesworth, Geograph (CCL)

Not all smuggling was small scale. Bideford's most famous smuggler was Tom Benson who was a leading merchant trading with the American colonies. He leased Lundy Island 12 miles out in the Bristol Channel and used it to land tobacco without paying duty.

The law caught up with him when he arranged for a ship called the Nightingale to land on Lundy Island and be scuttled. Benson claimed insurance for the ship's loss but was undone when one of the crew got drunk and spilled the beans. Benson escaped justice by fleeing to Portugal but the ship's captain was hanged.

#### Directions 15

Turn left along The Quay. Cross over the main road at the first crossing and turn left. Go past the statue of Charles Kingsley where we started the walk, across the entrance to the car park and through the gates into Victoria Park. Follow the main path to the right and then take the first path on the left. Go across the grass to the bandstand which is a platform surrounded by cannon.

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## 16. Making a bang

### Bandstand, Victoria Park

The nine cannons that surround this bandstand were discovered in 1890 during work to widen Bideford quay. A sign says that these are Spanish Armada cannons but another possibility is that they came from a Spanish ship, the Santa Maria de Vincenze, which Sir Richard Grenville captured on his return journey from Roanoake in 1585 that we heard about earlier.



'Armada cannon' in Victoria Park  
© Mike Jackson

It is generally accepted that gunpowder and cannons were invented by the Chinese, possibly as early as the ninth century, but some claim that gunpowder was invented in India even earlier. The development of cannons altered the course of warfare worldwide.

The English first used cannon in the fourteenth century at the Battle of Crécy in 1346 during the 100 Years War with France. As smaller cannon were developed these came to be used on ships and changed the course of warfare at sea. In fact, the English were particularly skilled at using cannon on ships and they played a major role in the defeat of the Spanish Armada.

Wars have played a big part in Bideford's fortunes. As we heard earlier defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 opened up the salt cod trade. The English Civil War and French wars brought periods of depression in the seventeenth century before Bideford entered its most prosperous time. This in turn was ended by the American War of Independence and the Napoleonic Wars from the 1770s to 1815.

Here in Victoria Park you will find reminders of more recent wars including a tree planted by the US Army stationed here during the Second World War and a memorial of the Burma Star Association.

This is an appropriate place to end our walk which has demonstrated the worldwide connections of this small North Devon port. A combination of its geographical location on the River Torridge, the actions of Elizabethan adventurer Sir Richard Grenville, and the entrepreneurship of a number of merchants transformed Bideford from a small fishing town into a major international port.

#### Directions 16

Do visit Burton Art Gallery & Museum here in the park where you can learn more about Bideford's heritage. There are some excellent displays about the town's social history as well as some excellent collections of pottery.

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## Credits

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