



A (very) potted history of Mumbles

Mumbles has always been popular. It has been inhabited for over [thirty thousand years](#) established by dating the famous Paviland skeleton which is now on the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, and was found in a cave on the Gower; evidence of Bronze Age metal workers has been unearthed and the cliffs above Caswell Bay contain remnants of an Iron Age hill fort.

The [Mumbles oyster trade](#) had been in existence for many hundreds of years and was indeed, one of the mainstays of the village. The Romans are believed to have made use of the local supply, during their stay. No doubt the inhabitants of the Roman villa discovered on the site of the present All Saints Church would have enjoyed them!

As time went by, the trade increased and they were being sold as far away as Bristol, Gloucester and London. In Victorian times, the season which ran from September until May, would commence with an Oyster Fair, when at the skiff-owners' expense, the oyster dredgers would be given a meal of bread, cheese and beer followed by sports such as donkey-racing, climbing the greasy pole and sack-racing.

The trade went from strength to strength from 1850 until 1873 and peaked with around 560 men employed in this heavy and dangerous occupation, using 188 skiffs; each man could earn as much as £6 a week and consequently, oysters were an everyday food for the locals, often eaten in an omelet, or coated in bread-crumbs or in a 'carpet-bag'— a grilled steak filled with oysters. Yet trade began to slump, the skiffs were sold or abandoned and by 1920 a virus finished the industry.

If you explore the beach behind the tennis courts in Mumbles today you can still find the remains of several skiffs, the remnants of a once spectacular fleet.

[Oystermouth Castle](#), Mumbles was built by the Normans in the twelfth century and is undergoing renovation; we look forward to it re-opening to the public in April 2013. It was built as one of many castles to defend against the native Welsh princes intent on reclaiming lands stolen by the Norman invaders.

In 1793 the [Mumbles Lighthouse](#) was erected on the outer of the two tidal islands of Mumbles Head after many a dreadful shipwreck - there was a thriving smuggler trade too.

History was made when [the worlds first passenger railway](#) was built between Mumbles and Swansea. Initially designed for carrying coal, a horse drawn passenger service was added in 1807; it was an immediate success and as the train service developed Mumbles became a popular tourist destination. Demand was such that Mumbles pier was constructed and opened in 1898 to serve as the new terminus. Later it also became the boarding point for the [steam paddleboats](#) that took day trippers between Ilfracombe & Mumbles.

The [RNLI lifeboat](#) slipway was added and a [boathouse](#) built on it in 1922 - these remain in use but the sea has taken its toll and a new lifeboat house is being built in 2013. Sadly the Mumbles railway was dismantled in 1960 but many locals would like to see it reinstated - a [land train](#) runs now, taking holidaymakers along the front between Mumbles and Blackpill. Mumbles Pier lost its dance hall but gained an amusement arcade in 1966, which is still an attraction with arcade games, bowling alley and a cafe.

[Dylan Thomas](#) was a regular visitor to Mumbles where The Mermaid is reputed to have been his favourite haunt. Other famous current Mumbles residents include the actress [Catherine Zeta Jones](#) (who is almost a neighbour - the house she shares with husband Michael Douglas is five minutes away from our cottages!!) and singer/songwriter [Bonnie Tyler](#) - maybe you'll spot them!