

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI AND THE SEASIDE:
A PLACE OF HOPE AND REMEMBRANCE

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Christina Rossetti died in London, having lived almost her entire 64 years in that city. Her letters offer us brief glimpses into her life during those years. She regularly attended church: first, Christ Church, Albany Street; and then later Christ Church, Woburn Square. She often visited her close friend Amelia Heimann and her family, living in Gordon Square. On occasion she attended a concert or lecture. She read at the British Library, and she subscribed to Mudie's Lending Library. She shopped on Southampton Road, and she bought flowers in Covent Garden. Quite often she walked to her destination, and at other times she took the omnibus or enjoyed the comfort of a cab ride. She became familiar with the train stations, and came to see London Bridge Station "with its whirl of traffic" as an emblem of London itself (Rossetti, *Commonplace* 33). In terms of her writer's life, perhaps most significant is the fact that she composed much of her poetry and prose when inside the domestic spaces of a Georgian townhouse. Certainly one might, as Sarah Teasdale once phrased it, see her as having lived "a London life" (qtd in Harrison, "Epistolary" 93). Indeed, once in conversation, Rossetti was heard to describe herself as a "confirmed Londoner"; yet in that same conversation, she also spoke of understanding the "beauty and wonder" of the sea (Sharp 738). Like so many of her fellow Victorians, Rossetti often sought the seaside. In quest of improved health or holiday pleasure or both, she visited several of the watering-places along the English coast. Most often her companion was her beloved mother, who also took great pleasure in watching the "phases of the sea" (F. Rossetti, *Letters Angeli-Dennis*).¹ The seaside became a place of valued memories, memories Rossetti might draw upon when sitting in a London drawing room on a winter day. Moreover, as she began to look with middle-aged eyes, the sights and sounds of the sea, even the sea air, began to blend with the promises of her religious beliefs, until being by the sea invited feelings of a patient hope that at the end of time she might see again those she had loved on earth.