

South Hams heritage

Coastal Fortifications

There are many coastal fortifications and associated structures of various dates in the South Hams. All were constructed over the last 600 years, to protect ports and coastal areas from invasion.

Dartmouth was one of the 10 most important ports in medieval England, and was well served with coastal fortifications between the 14thC and 16thC. Four artillery forts protected the harbour mouth in the early 16thC, Kingswear and Gomerock on the east, and Dartmouth and Bayards Cove on the west. Kingswear and Gomerock are privately owned though entry to Bayards Cove fort, constructed around 1500 as a double decked artillery fort, is free. **Bayards Cove: Grid Reference SX 879 510**

Dartmouth Castle: Grid Reference SX 887 503

Dartmouth Castle has stood at the waterfront for over 600 years defending the narrow entrance of the Dart estuary. The gun tower was one of the first purpose-built gun towers to mount heavy cannons. It is an ideal spot to picnic and watch the river. Look out for peregrines and seabirds such as guillemots, gannets, cormorants and shags. The castle is owned by English Heritage and there is an entrance fee.

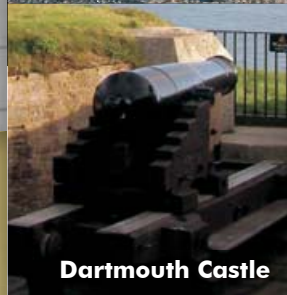
South Hams boasts a wealth of historic buildings and natural landmarks, some of which date back to the Iron Age.

The National Trust has more properties in Devon than in any other county. In the South Hams these include Coleton Fishacre, Compton Castle and Greenway (Agatha Christie's Home).

In similar vein, English Heritage has some very fine castles at Totnes, Dartmouth and Berry Pomeroy, as well as archaeological sites on the moor and a host of smaller properties.

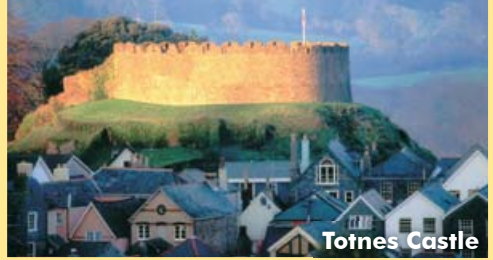


Bayards Cove



Dartmouth Castle

On the hill above Dartmouth Castle, is a large earthwork fort of the Civil War at Gallant's Bower. This was built in 1642 and defended briefly against a Parliamentary force in 1643. It is National Trust land and access is free.



Inland Fortifications

Berry Pomeroy Castle: Grid Ref SX 839 623

The ruins of a fine medieval castle and stately Elizabethan mansion, the former homes of the Pomeroy and Seymour families. The castle is set in beautiful and romantic woodland but is supposed to be the most haunted castle in Devon. Two of the Pomeroy brothers rode to their deaths over the castle ramparts and legend has it that the sound of the galloping hooves can be still heard today.

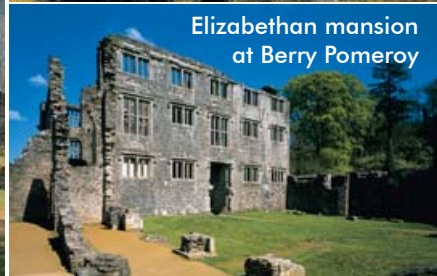
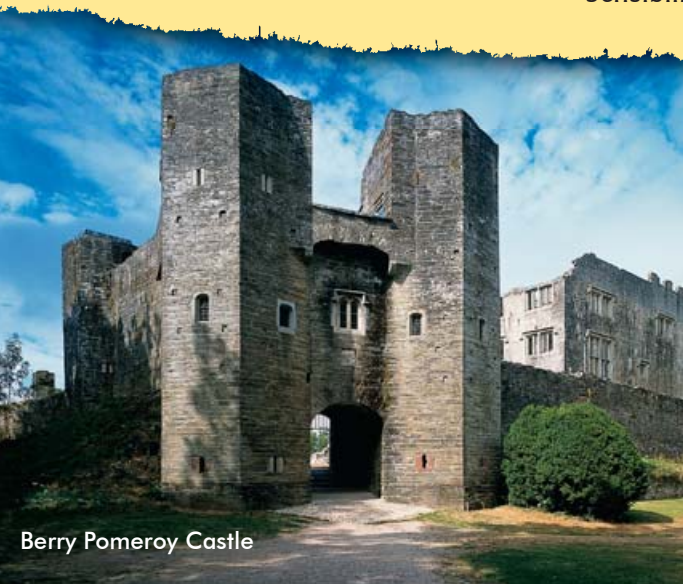
Look for bats roosting in the tower, there are several species including lesser and greater horseshoe and pipistrelle.

Totnes Castle: Grid Ref SX 801 606

Totnes Castle stands at the top of Totnes town and is the legacy of the Norman reign. It is one of the finest examples of an early Norman motte and bailey castle. The motte that once surrounded it is now filled with cottages and gardens of the town. The castle offers splendid views of the town, the river Dart and Dartmoor.

Compton Castle: Grid Ref SX 865 648

Built between the 14th-16th centuries, the castle has been home to the Gilbert family for most of the last 600 years. Sir Humphrey Gilbert was coloniser of Newfoundland and half-brother to Sir Walter Raleigh. It was also a film location for Sense and Sensibility (1995).



Hill forts

Hill forts are substantial earthwork enclosures constructed between about 600-100 BC for various purposes including settlement, farm stock management, but primarily defence. Typically a hill fort has one or more deep ditches with high earth banks on their inner sides, enclosing an ovoid area between three and ten acres in size.

They developed at a time when interaction between social groups in the Celtic tribal world of Western Europe was becoming increasingly territorial. There was constant disagreement and hot-headedness among warriors, which often spilled over into cattle raiding between tribal groups and occasionally full-scale war.

There are many Iron Age hill forts in the South Hams, with some good examples of “Multi Enclosure Forts” such as Holbury Camp near Holbeton, Noss Camp near Kingswear, and Burleigh Dolts near Malborough. However, only a few have public access, and the following are well worth a visit:



**Compass plinth
and castle
earthworks
at Blackdown
Rings**

Burleigh Dolts, Malborough: Grid Reference SX 708 406

A public footpath crosses the site, which can be followed from the north side of Malborough village. The name Dolts was originally pronounced Dikes. This complex site probably originated as a single-enclosure fort of the early Iron Age, dating from about 600-400 BC. It was then developed in about 300-100 BC as a multiple-enclosure fort.

Blackdown Rings, Loddiswell: Grid Reference SX 720 520

This early Iron Age single enclosure fort probably dates from 600-400 BC. As it is located on a driveway it is likely to have been used as a stock corralling area.

The hill fort has very sharply defined ditches, the result of cleaning out and reprofiling in the late 11th century AD, when a small Norman ringwork and bailey castle was built in the north-west corner. It is likely that this castle was placed here to control people travelling the east-west and north-south routes in exactly the same way as the earlier hill fort did.

A permissive path leads from a small car park just south-west of the fort. Two explanatory boards show how the fort and Norman castle may have appeared. The site is owned by the Arundell Charity and there is free public access.



**Warfleet Creek Kiln, Dartmouth:
Grid Reference SX 883 504**

A lovely walk from the town to the easily accessible kiln with an interpretation board.

**Frogmore Kiln Bank, Frogmore:
Grid Reference SX 771 426**

This is an impressive triple well kiln, built into the river cliff on the north side of the creek. An impressive single well kiln can be seen further down the creek on the south side. The kilns are easily accessible along the water's edge but only at low tide! You can park in Frogmore village, then walk down the lane to the foreshore and turn right along the water's edge.

**Kilns at Wonwell Beach, Kingston:
Grid Reference SX 621 480 and
SX 619 476**

Two kilns can be seen here, the earliest of which is the single well 'doughnut' kiln, which stands on the beach a little way upstream from the slipway. When built, it abutted the cliff, but this has eroded away leaving the kiln isolated on the beach. The other kiln, a later 18th century D shaped one is just downstream from the slip. Car parking at Wonwell Beach is limited, but as the site is on the South West Coast Path, you might consider walking there, perhaps from Kingston village, 2km away. The tide tables should be checked before planning a visit!

Lime kilns

These substantial stone structures are common in the South Hams, especially around tidal estuaries. Most were constructed between 1700-1850, and many operated until the early 20th century.

They converted limestone to quicklime by burning it. Quicklime could be used for mortar, plaster and limewash, but in most cases it was used as a dressing on fields to reduce the acidity, so the soil could absorb nitrates more readily. Only a few of the lime kilns are publicly accessible. Those on estuary shores are best visited by boat, but the following are accessible on foot and are well worth seeing.

**Perchwood Lime Kilns, Tuckenhay:
Grid Reference SX 815 563**

The kilns are alongside the lane which leads from Bow Bridge to Tuckenhay, 3km south of Totnes. An illustrated board explains the history of the kilns and how they worked.

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