

Dartmouth town trail



Discover the heritage of the town

A gentle walk around the town of Dartmouth taking in historic features of interest.

Start: | Duke St, Dartmouth. TQ6 9PZ

Distance: | 1 mile (1.5-2 hours)

Difficulty: | Easy; steep climb

Terrain: | Surfaced paths

Parking: | Mayors Avenue car park, Dartmouth. TQ6 9NG (length of stay restricted May-Sep). High season option – Dartmouth Park and Ride. Proceed to Mayor's Avenue car park for start of walk.

OS map: | Explorer OL20

Grid Ref: | SX 877 513

Public transport: | Buses to Kingswear and Dartmouth – www.travelinesw.com; Steam train to Kingswear www.dartmouthrailriver.co.uk Ferry details at www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/walks

Refreshments: | In Dartmouth

Toilets: | In Royal Avenue Gardens



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Directions

- 1 The Sloping Deck:** Notice the Butterwalk opposite, a fine row of houses with columns, built in 1635. At that time ships from Newfoundland could sail to the back of the Butterwalk and ground on the beach, part of which has been reclaimed to build these houses. Their insecure foundations soon caused the rear to subside. Inside, fine original plasterwork and wainscoting can be seen on the first floor of the (well named) Sloping Deck Restaurant and the Dartmouth Museum. It is considered the finest room in Dartmouth, worthy of King Charles II who dined here in 1671. The museum is worth a separate visit for its interesting collection of maritime exhibits.
- 2 The Quay in the Town:** Cross the road towards the entrance of Royal Avenue Gardens. The Quay was built on land reclaimed from the sea between 1588 and 1640 to meet the needs of the Newfoundland fishing trade. Although the houses at the far end of The Quay were rebuilt in the 19th century, those from The Royal Castle Hotel to the Butterwalk are much as they were in 1639 when their wealthy merchant owners could watch the ships moor right outside their windows. The Royal Castle first became an inn in the 1730's. The embankment of 1885 cut off The Quay from the estuary for large ships, with a bridge allowing only small boats to enter, so today the boatfloat is only used by small craft and a resident group of swans.
- 3 From Tidal Pool to Park:** On your left, the site of the Royal Avenue Gardens was reclaimed between 1670 and 1680 from mudflats, to provide additional walls to which ships could moor. In Victorian times it was laid out as formal gardens complete with bandstand. The gardens were relandscaped by South Hams District Council in 1991. For 200 years this was an island linked to the north corner of the new quay by a bridge. Turn left, leaving Royal Avenue Gardens on the right and in a few yards you will see Dartmouth Visitor Centre and the Newcomen Engine House. Inside is an atmospheric engine invented in Dartmouth in 1712 by Thomas Newcomen, a local ironmonger. It proved a key invention in



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the Industrial Revolution and was soon used to pump water out of coalfields all over Europe and America. Through colourful displays and a cartoon character, the story of Thomas Newcomen's life and invention is told, making the Engine House well worth a visit.

Keeping on the pavement, walk to the corner of the car park where a plaque records the filling of the whole area in 1876-1877. Opposite, to the left of where the new clinic now stands, is an old stone building that was once the mill house. This used to have two mill wheels, driven by the waters of the falling tide. The area here was one of Dartmouth's worst. Rubbish and detritus emptied from windows of the mill house into a fetid disease-ridden pool.

- 4 The Bonded Store:** Follow the road round to the right into Mayors Avenue, which was reclaimed about the same time. Until then, ships were built and repaired here. A short distance on from the supermarket, there was a warehouse with hooks to unload cargoes from ships. A vaulted customs bonded warehouse once used for storing dutiable spirits and tobacco lies behind the builders merchants.

Turn left into King's Quay, after 50 yards look left along Undercliff – a narrow path originally the 'red light' area of the port. Ladies of the Night occupied hovels in spaces left on the right hand side of the lane. According to an 18th century doctor, this place was more violent and worse than the London slums.

- 5 Sea Captains and Shipbuilders:** Clarence Street was a favourite place for sea captains to live, close to where the ships came in. At the end of Clarence Street is the Ship In Dock Inn that used to overlook small shipbuilding yards on the edge of Coombe Mud. This area was filled in to form Coronation Park in 1937 when the North Embankment was completed. Look along the Dart towards the floating bridge or higher ferry. In 1831 this provided the first vehicular crossing of the Dart below Totnes.

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To the left, uphill there is a good view of Britannia Royal Naval College. In 1905 this replaced the two ships 'Britannia' and 'Hindustan' that had trained officers of the Royal Navy since 1864. Prince Charles and Prince Andrew followed family tradition in taking their naval training there.

Return along Clarence Street and fork right up Clarence Hill. This is a medieval street, named after a visit in 1828 by the Duke of Clarence, later William IV. Mount Galpin, on the right was the town house of the Holdsworth family, the rulers of Dartmouth for over a century. They then looked down on the mill pool, where the lower town is now. The all powerful Holdsworths (7 generations) were at the forefront of triangular trade with Newfoundland and the Mediterranean - great prosperity resulted for Dartmouth.

6 A Stepped Packhorse Track: Continue up Clarence Hill, then turn left where the road forks uphill and go down Brown's Hill Steps to your left. A stepped lane lined by attractive cottages, Brown's Hill was once the main packhorse route out of the town before roads existed for wheeled traffic. At the bottom, turn right and cross the road into the market square. Here the old Pannier Market is crowded with shoppers every Tuesday and Friday. When you have explored the pannier market, leave with the Dolphin Inn on your left, to go through to Foss Street, built in the 13th century as a dam across the tidal creek to power the mills. Today Foss Street is an attractive pedestrian shopping precinct. Turn right, crossing Victoria Road into Anzac Street.

7 The Wine Merchants' Church: Ahead, on the left, lies St. Saviour's Church, consecrated in 1372, which contains many treasures of great beauty. It was built by Dartmouth merchants who had become rich in the Bordeaux wine trade, like the famous John Hawley whose brass lies in the chancel. The original church of the town, St. Clement's at Townstal, was by that time far from where most people lived. The town's earliest fire engine once stood in the churchyard, along with the ducking mast and stool to plunge cheats and nagging wives or

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'scolds', over the churchyard wall and into the river. John Hawley (together with Newcomen) was one of Dartmouth's most important and influential citizens. He met Geoffrey Chaucer here and was almost certainly the model for The Shipman in 'The Canterbury Tales'.

8 From Criminals to Cherubs: From the church door, look left down Church Close with its 17th century houses. Follow the road round to the right past the Seven Stars Inn and left onto Smith Street, with Higher Street at right angles to it. This was the commercial centre of the town from medieval times. The pillory stood in the square. The three fine timbered 17th century houses to your left were, until Victorian times, the shambles, or butchers' shops. Turn right along Higher Street passing the Cherub Inn which still retains its 14th century timbers and an original window. Once a row of similar houses stood opposite, but only one, the Community Bookshop, remains to show the original width of the street. The bookshop was established by Christopher Milne, the original Christopher Robin. Go down the steps beside the Cherub and turn right into Lower Street, which was once on the edge of the Dart. Every building between it and the embankment stands on reclaimed land. A plaque on the ramped stone wall further along to the right, on Newcomen Road, marks the place where Thomas Newcomen's workshop (demolished to make way for the road) once stood.

9 The Horse Ferry: Returning to Lower Street, continue to the far end and look left to see the lower ferry slipway. The site of the earliest rowboat ferry to Kingswear, it was replaced in 1834 by the 'horse ferry' -also rowed, but capable of taking two horses and carts. Straight ahead, where the road narrows to its original medieval width is Agincourt House, a 14th

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century building recently restored. Inside is a good example of a merchant's house, where the outline of the original internal courtyard, previously open to the elements, can be seen along with a room at the back that would have been the kitchen.

10 Actors and Pilgrims: Ahead lies Bayards Cove, with its quay and fort dating from the early 16th century. A plaque commemorates the visit of the Pilgrim Fathers here in 1620 en route for New England. The cobbled quay has formed the setting for films and TV including The Onedin Line and, more recently, The Coroner.

11 Steamers and Steam Trains: Return past the ferry slipway and turn right along Coles Court which leads to the South Embankment, built in 1885 when Dartmouth was expanding as a bunkering port for steamers. Continued silting up led to the embankment being widened by six metres in 1987. Have a close look at the Russian cannon, a trophy of the Crimean War. Walk left along the embankment, to Dartmouth Station, (now a restaurant) which never had a railway line to it. Tickets included the ferry crossing to Kingswear Station opposite. Return to the start, turn left, walk beside the boatfloat then right along The Quay back to Duke Street.

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