

The immediate landscape here shows the existence of small enclosures until you reach the waterfall (SS 223.579 123.633).

**9. Walk down to the cliff top above Speke's Mill Beach**

of the mansion of the richest man in Hartland in the 16thC. towards the head of the valley there are three water mills and the location and remains were still visible until recently. Air photographs of Milford show a good example of a medieval strip field system. Below Milford and another of the chapels for Stoke, sited just off the common or green, mentioned within Hartland in the Domesday Book. Milford was the site is the hamlet of Milford (SS 223.127 122.551), one of the four Manors itself stop and look across and south eastwards. Opposite on the horizon The footpath takes you down into the Speke's valley, as the valley reveals

**8. Turn left through Speke's House gate.**

early age of farming. still part of the Abbey estate and is an unspoilt set of buildings from an to one of the chapels attached to the main church at Stoke. Kernstone is the site of which is now unclear, and allegedly the tenement was home improvement in farming techniques. Kernstone also had a water mill, until all the holdings were later combined into one unit, reflecting the with most such tenements Kernstone was home to a small collective Kernstone is a tenement often mentioned within documentation. As

**7. At the four cross way turn right signed 'Kernstone**

**6. Take the right hand road signed for Elmscott,**

**5. Return to the road, continue left to the 'T' junction.**

a church inquiry some time later, but due to the passage of time and the death of one party it was not accepted as a miracle.

**4. Walk past the Church House for approx. 100m, and**

**3. Walk from the church gate through the short avenue**

**2. Leave the churchyard by the east gate, on the right of**

**1. The walk starts from the church car parks on the**

original site of the first monastic cell at Stoke. at Hartland Abbey. It is also thought, by some, to be the location of the Butler's Cottage and as the name suggests was once the home of the Butler of parish life until the end of the 15thC. Opposite the Church House is level are two gaderobes. This building would have been at the centre stair access with its slit windows to the upper floor; at the rear at first floor the quality of the stone work and note the position of the original external church in the medieval period. Looking at the front of the building admire guesthouse and for holding public entertainment to raise funds for the

This is a good example of such a building used originally as both a used to support a slate slab within the gate entrance upon which coffins were rested as the body travelled from life, outside the church, to the hereafter, inside the church. The slate slab was later used as a foundation for a memorial but was rediscovered when the large churchyard cross was erected. It was in fact the original altar stone from the church used up until the Reformation - it bears incised crosses and was broken to prevent reuse. This slab is now languishing against the exterior of the church tower.

Just inside the gate are two substantial lumps of squared stone. These were used to support a slate slab within the gate entrance upon which coffins were rested as the body travelled from life, outside the church, to the hereafter, inside the church. The slate slab was later used as a foundation for a memorial but was rediscovered when the large churchyard cross was erected. It was in fact the original altar stone from the church used up until the Reformation - it bears incised crosses and was broken to prevent reuse. This slab is now languishing against the exterior of the church tower.

PLEASE OBSERVE THE NOTICES WITH REGARD TO PARKING. Stoke is the location for the veneration of the life of St Nectan, and before the Norman Conquest Gytha, the wife of Earl Godwin, one of the most important figures in the late Saxon period, translated this into a monastic holding. By the 12thC this had become a substantial monastery complex. Today we have Hartland Abbey, St Nectan's Well, and the magnificent church as permanent reminders of the devotion of our ancestors.

**The Walk**

This is one of a series of four Heritage walks that uncover some of the fascinating history across the Hartland Peninsula.

This is a circular walk of approximately four miles that includes roads, public footpaths and some steep and rough terrain. The walk will take you from Stoke through a section of The South West Coast Path between Spekes Valley and Hartland Quay, and takes in information recently gathered from community projects led by the University of Exeter, Department of Archaeology.

Please adhere to the Countryside Code especially: Look but don't touch, Respect, Protect, Enjoy. There are toilets at Stoke, where the walk begins, and refreshments available from the Hartland Quay Hotel, about two thirds of the way round the walk or at Stoke Barton Farm.

Please download the associated map of the walk from [www.hartlandpeninsula.co.uk](http://www.hartlandpeninsula.co.uk), where you can also download the audio version of this walk and find other Heritage Trails, walking routes and information on places to stay, eat and explore.

**The Coastal Heritage Walk**



St Nectan's Church



Stoke Barton

You can also download:

- Three more walks in the Heritage series, in both print and audio format
- Six printed walking routes and two video walks to explore the beautiful Peninsula countryside
- The Hartland Treasure Trail, for families, from the award winning Treasure Trails company

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**Incredible landscapes.  
Extraordinary things to do.  
Beautiful places to stay.**

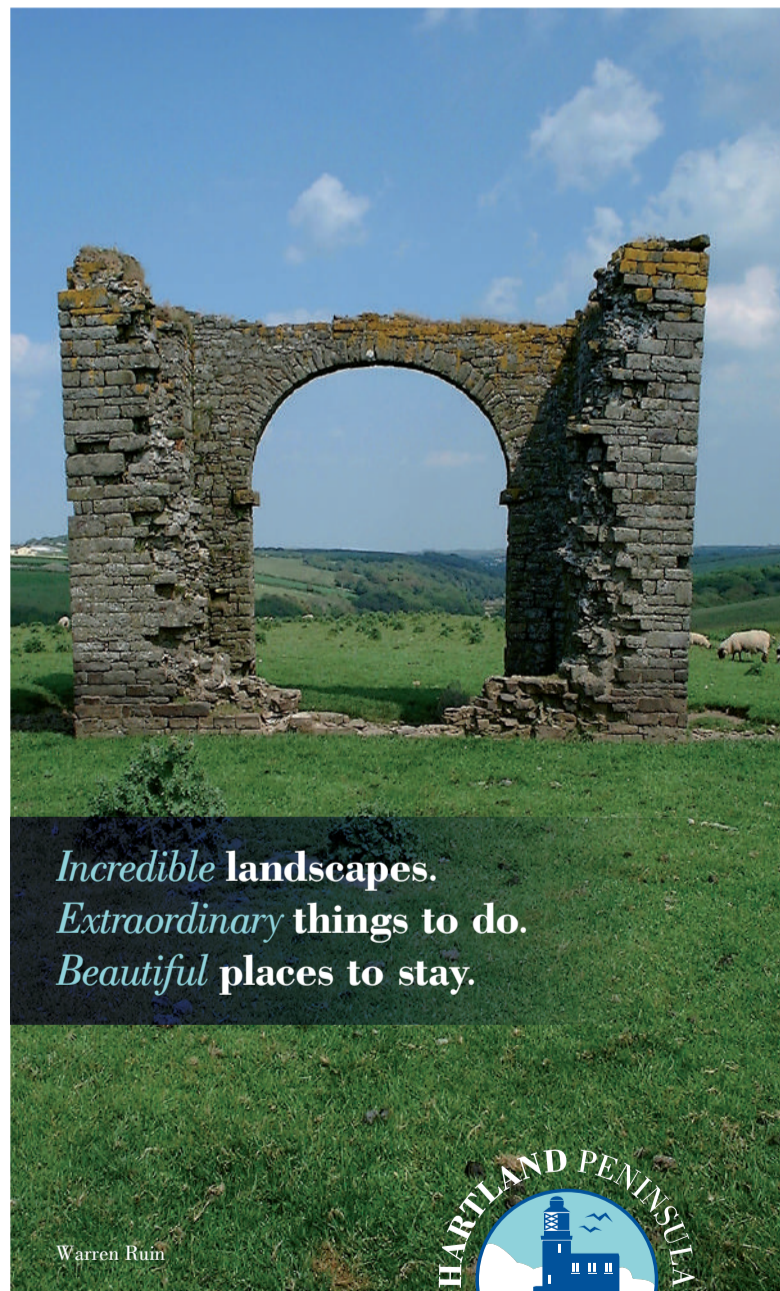
The Hartland Peninsula Association is grateful to Stephen Hobbs for supplying the heritage content for this walk.

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Part financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development  
2007 - 2013 : Europe investing in Rural Areas

Design : [stonecreative.co.uk](http://stonecreative.co.uk) : 01271 336275

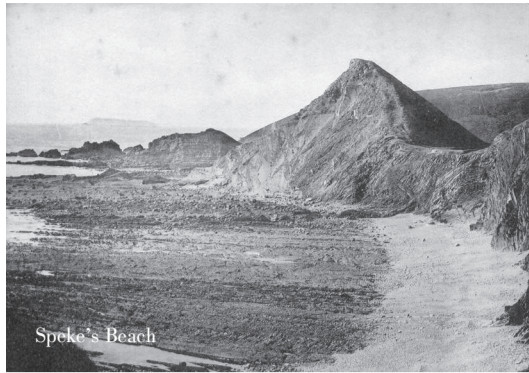


Warren Ruin

**Incredible landscapes.  
Extraordinary things to do.  
Beautiful places to stay.**



The Heritage Trail Series  
**The Coastal  
Heritage Walk**



made of earth banks. These are sand bins. Sand and gravel were brought up from the beach in panniers on the backs of donkeys. Local farmers and builders purchased the product for use in construction or as fertiliser. Most tenancy agreements in Hartland included a defined measurement for the amount of sea sand to be spread on the land per year.

The river at Speke's Mill Beach has the highest waterfall in Hartland. All except one of the rivers in the parish that empty into the sea end in waterfalls of various heights. The origin of the name Speke's is unknown but has been suggested to be connected with the explorer of that name John Hanning Speke (1827-64) who lived at Buckland Brewer. An officer in the British Indian Army he was active on three expeditions into Africa, to Somalia, The Great Lakes and Lake Victoria. But evidence for this link between person and location is hard to find and the use of the name Speke's would appear to predate the family name.

### 10. Take the South West Coast Path north along the cliff top above Speke's Mill Beach until you reach the gate at the top (SS 222.645 123.712).

Look at what is one of the rarer of geological features in England - a sea dissected valley system. Note how the river coming down the Speke's valley now empties over the waterfall. Now turn and look north (to your right) at the dry valley below St Catherine's Tor (which is the high jutting peak in front of you), then further north as the valley continues. At one time the Speke's River continued past the foot of St Catherine's Tor and through the valley past Hartland Quay and on north. As the sea has eroded the coastline these present sections of valley and headland have become isolated and often dry. This is termed a sea dissected valley and it is visited by geologists, geographers and students as a fine example of the formation.

### 11. Walk down into the valley and stand immediately below St. Catherine's Tor (SS 222.630 124.067).

Take note of a winding track that makes its way to the summit of the Tor upon where it is alleged a chapel once stood. Evidence of a building was recovered from the summit by antiquarians in the 19thC. Some artefacts are on view in the Pope's Chamber at St Nectan's church. Some decorated tiles were found by Mr William Heard, a watchmaker and early antiquarian of Hartland, when he was a lad on a family picnic. He brought them down to show everyone, but lack of interest made him dispose of them into the hedge - are they still there and where?

By comparing photographs it is possible to see that some forty foot has been lost from the Tor within the last century. The valley below St Catherine's Tor holds one of the unseen statements of status in Hartland. It has been said for many years that 'The Abbott had a Swannery' [at The Tor Marsh]. Recent investigation in conjunction with The Department of Archaeology at the University of Exeter has set out to map the valley using modern survey and GPS equipment. The results have shown some interesting detail of the valley floor. The southern (dry) section is bounded on the cliff side and against the Tor by an earth bank, the eastern edge abuts the hillside below Kernstone. Within this 'compound' there would appear to be at least four shallow ponds. These are visible in low shadow across the valley.

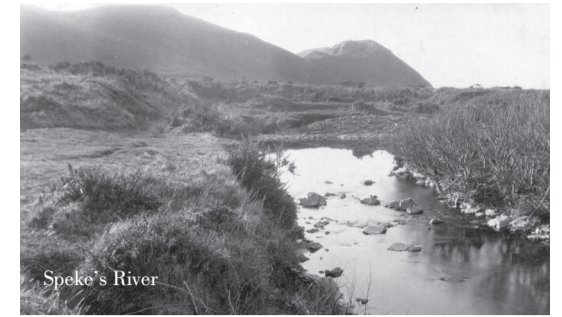
### 12. Walk around the base of the Tor to the stepping stones across the stream.

You will notice that on both sides the stream is enclosed by low earth banks. These continue the length of the valley and act as a water impounding device, particularly for the northern valley. Whilst in this northern valley below the Tor it is worth walking along both the riverside bank and also the stone enclosure wall on the northern side. The riverside bank is a continuation of the impounding system whilst the stone wall is unusual in that it is a double faced Corn Ditch. It is usual for such a Corn Ditch wall to be one sided often constructed as a slight incline on one side, the other vertical and topped with a protruding stone layer. This allows animals to escape from a field growing such as cereals but deters them jumping in. Why this wall has protrusions on both sides is unclear.

This wall is home to numerous varieties of lichen and similar types of plant life, although recently despoiled by the crude erection of fencing which has partially buried the wall and a loss of much lichen. The bracken and gorse hillside above was one of the last locations where the large blue butterfly occurred. It went extinct in this country in 1979 although there is a re-introduction programme currently running.

### 13. Continue walking around the base of the Tor to the gate (SS 222.517 124.265) at the end, by the river.

Beside this gate the adjacent large earth and stone-faced bank is often thought to be the dam that created the Swan Pool. This is an error as if you look on the northern side of the bank you will see a smaller bank



system which corresponds with the banks you have followed through the valley. Survey work has confirmed that all these small banks are essentially able to impound water at a consistent level. The large earth bank was in fact built in the mid-18thC in reaction to serious flooding that occurred. It would appear that at one time there was a set of buildings termed 'The Kennels' at this point and these and the hounds were washed away in the flood. The hunting committee of the Gorvin Hunt meeting at Hartland Quay commissioned the erection of this substantial wall to prevent a reoccurrence (call and see the Gorvin Hunting Glass held at the Burton Gallery, Bideford). It is interesting to take a look inside what remains of a cattle shelter excavated into the bank as its exposed walls display the method by which the bank was built, layer by layer with a rather crude topping off.

To allow control of the water level a weir or sluice was built in the river and set into the bank just by the present access gates. Some very large pieces of stone were set into the river bed to form the weir, these having been displaced in the last century allowing the river to flow unrestricted and the valley to become dry. Core samples of the valley floor were taken which exposed some layering of water born sludge but the majority of any depth of information has been damaged by ploughing over the years.

### 14. Pass through the gate and take the path north towards Hartland Quay.

As the Quay comes into sight take a moment to look back towards Speke's. You can now fully appreciate (a) the extent of the sea dissected valley system, both north and south and (b) the extensive views of the spectacular coastline. With this in mind now imagine as a sea captain bringing your sailing boat along the coast in windy conditions to make harbour at Hartland Quay!

### 15. You enter the area of Hartland Quay via the 'Middle' car park (SS 222.347 124.741).

The history of the Quay is well documented and it will suffice to say that the harbour wall was built under an Act of Parliament in the 16thC,

gained by Mr Abbott of Hartland Abbey, and existed until the end of the 19thC, when it was destroyed in two stages by storm. The port was the trade hub for the region, bringing in goods from a wide area and allowing exports, particularly cereals. A fine book is available to purchase from the Quay Shop which fully explains the port. If you wish you can walk down to Hartland Quay for year-round refreshments, toilets and, seasonally, the Shipwreck Museum. Otherwise:

### 16. Continue up the road to the top and the Rocket House (SS 222.620 124.793).

The Rocket House, until sold off, was the building storing the apparatus used by rescue services which included a Breeches Buoy system hence the name Rocket. To allow the rescue teams to practice a mast was situated on the Warren and the 'Rocket' shot (by a man running with it) at the mast, then the Breeches Buoy was set up and used. The road from Hartland Quay into Bideford was improved under the turnpike system with Toll Houses at appropriate points collecting the money. It is alleged that locally people avoided these charges by taking a path that runs along the northern side of the hedge beside the Turnpike Road. This is now marked by a series of stone stiles as far as the church.

### 17. Take the gate beside the Rocket House and enter the large field called The Warren. Walk on as far as the ruin on the skyline (north).

This ruin (SS 222.637 125.085) was in the 13thC probably a Warrener's House, the home and workshop of the Keeper of the Warren. In this instance the game was rabbit, the area in front of the 'House' being covered by a number of artificial rabbit warrens. Rabbit was a precious commodity both as food and as fur in the medieval period, and was protected against poachers. Hence the substantial building here allowing a clear view not only across the present Warren Field visible today, but also the greater area that the Warren once covered. In later years the ruin of the house was transformed into a Summer House then as a Romantic Ruin which enhanced the view from Hartland Abbey in the valley below. Some drawings show this as a church, but this is unlikely to have been the case as shown by the results gained from geophysical survey undertaken by The University of Exeter, Department of Archaeology. Whilst at the ruin look inside and see the position of a fireplace and window at first floor height. Also see the key-stones of the archway which have early examples of religious decoration on them.

### 18. Take the path that runs back towards the road diagonally across the Warren.

Notice the remains of a sizable earthen hillock in the field. This is registered as a burial mound (tumuli) in the Historic Environment Register, but one wonders now if it is actually the last visible remains of an artificial rabbit warren? A photograph taken at the close of the

20th century, and used for a postcard, does show a number of these hillocks within the field. Whilst crossing the Warren you have extensive views across the parish of Hartland. On the immediate north is Berry and Markadon Farms with the castellated Blegbury Farm a valley further. On the hilltop east above Hartland Abbey is Cheristow, the site of a chapel compound and suggested as one of the early Christian sites in the area. Then of course there is the church of St Nectan, its tower is visible from so many view points, often caught as a glimpse as you pass a gate, it is known as 'Peeping Tom'.

**At this point is an option to take a detour south (A) or to return direct to Stoke (B)...**

### 19A. Exit the Warren via the gate and cross the road, take the marked footpath south (SS 222.903 124.850).

Note the lichen on the stone wall, generally an expression of clean air quality. This wall shows signs of being repaired on a number of occasions and it is interesting to spot the various styles and quality of repair. Two of the areas were used as a training exercise in stone walling recently, unfortunately the poorest quality in the whole length, and the pile of unused stone left behind spoils the field. A very fine example, although a fast deteriorating example, of a Corn Ditch exists in the south west corner of this field. In the field immediately west, and overlooking Hartland Quay, evidence has been found of early, possibly Bronze Age farming activities.

On the skyline in the field to the south is a large standing stone (SS 222.646 124.425) and in certain light conditions you can observe a large circular compound around this stone. Standing stones had been a feature of the landscape surrounding Stoke, a research paper by Robyn Wilson for Plymouth University has shown that there were possibly as many as thirty in the landscape surrounding Hartland Abbey. Of these only some seven remain standing, although he was able to trace the present location of many more now in use as lintels, well heads and hedge bases. The particular stone facing you is often described as having been moved in the 1950s. This is an error as air photographs clearly show it in situ at the beginning of the 20thC - the stone that moved is the one in Newberry Field, adjacent to Hartland Abbey, which was dug out and repositioned close to the well in the same field to allow efficient ploughing with tractor drawn ploughs as part of the change in agriculture following WWII.

**Now return to the Stoke road and continue as at (B).**

### 19B. Take the path which follows the inside of the hedge, parallel to the road, back towards Stoke and the church (SS 223.494 124.744).

Notice the stone stile here is made up of reused stonework taken from an earlier building. Such stone is also visible within the stone wall just north and particularly in the stone wall in the field south of the road and also in the Warren ruin. Whilst climbing the stile it is possible to see the change in the adjacent hedge dimensions on both sides of the road. This indicates the original extent of the area of the Warren.

On reaching the churchyard have a look at some of the headstones to see if you can spot those belonging to the daughter of Sir Malcolm Sergeant or indeed Isaac Newton!

The church at Stoke was built in the 13thC and is an expression of status to demonstrate the veneration of St Nectan, the presence of a religious community and the elevated rank of the Dinham family, the manorial lords of Hartland. It is known as the 'Cathedral of North Devon' due to its sheer size. The interior is rather plainer than may be expected, no memorials to the early manorial family for example. This is possibly due to the Dinhams transferring back to a main residence in Kingskerswell before the church was fully completed. Kingskerswell does have memorial effigies of the Dinhams, so the church at Stoke is possibly a part finished project, and one can only speculate on what the wealth and desires of the Dinhams would have given if they had remained at Hartland. There is a story board available in the church which explains its history, but you are invited to see if you can spot the changes made to the earliest structure to allow the Rood Screen to be installed or the 'protection' symbols carved into the pews. Admire the wonderful quality of the paintings in the window glass which are unusual in that they tell the history of the parish rather than a religious theme; can you spot the hidden monogram of Richard Pearse-Chope, a local antiquarian, in one of the windows or the link between Hartland and Penguin Books? The wonderful example of a decorated wagon roof in the Lady Chapel with its associated roof bosses running along the north aisle hide a spelling mistake (see the explanation in the photograph in Pope's Chamber).

The last building to look at is Stoke Barton Farm (SS 223.510 124.589) diagonally opposite from the church. This farm has long been associated with Hartland Abbey and continues to be its largest remaining agricultural holding in the parish. The present farm house was built at a cost of £360 at the behest of an incoming tenant Mr Exter. He is often described as an 'agricultural improver' and carried out numerous experiments in the use of fertilisers and various forms of farm equipment. Records exist of him constructing an early example of a threshing machine - and of his contention with the presence of the Toll Road running through the middle of his farm land! You may have noticed the memorial tablets within the church to the Exter family.

**This marks the end of the Coastal Heritage Walk. We hope you enjoyed it.**

