



The Heritage Trail Series

The Northern Heritage Walk



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 road, public footpaths and tracks. The walk will take you through a late medieval deer park, an early religious site and past some of the parish's more substantial houses, before returning to Hartland.

You will start and finish the walk in Hartland where there are shops, cafes and pubs for refreshments, and interesting galleries and potteries to visit. There are toilets, including disabled toilets, by the main car park where the walk begins. You will also pass Cheristow Lavender Farm which has a tea room, and Hartland Abbey, a stately home, gardens and tea room which is open during the season (see www.hartlandabbey.co.uk for times).

Please download the associated map of the walk from 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.

1. Start from the car park off The Square in Hartland (SS 225.922 124.448).

Leave the car park by its entrance and proceed straight ahead (west) towards West Street, approximately 200m from the car park. You will pass The Manor House on your right, owned for many years by the Prust family and used as a tannery. Notice the large serrated granite mill wheel leaning against the workshop wall. It was used to crush the bark from oak trees providing the tannin used in the treatment of leather.

2. At the end of West Street, turn right and walk down the lane towards the single story building at the bottom, which is the Observatory (SS 225.699 124.573).

At the end of West Street is a seat from which you can observe the course of the walk: north down the valley and along the ridge road westwards towards the large house on the skyline, then returning through the valley. The land immediately to the west and north of the seat encompasses two abutting deer parks, the south western being the earlier medieval.

The Observatory is operated by the British Geographic Survey, which records geomagnetic measurements. It was established at Hartland as the area was not subject to interference from industrial processes. When constructed the magnetic count of each building component was recorded to establish the magnetic bench mark for the station.

The instruments in the recording buildings are so sensitive that Mr Johns, an early occupant of the Observatory House, would tell of how they could record the passage of people along the footpath and how they would have to cancel out these measurements from the data. He boasted that he could identify who had walked past by their seismic footfall!

3. Continue to follow the public footpath around the edge of the Observatory compound and along the Sawpit woodland path into the valley.

The Observatory compound, the adjoining fields with the river valley and the fields immediately north of the valley formed the second deer park established at Hartland by the Dinham family. Evidence of the substantial wall and banks are visible along the eastern and northern boundaries. The west boundary is less clear but may follow the line of the footpath as it climbs the northern valley side.

4. Continue walking on the track down into the woodland until you cross the wet area of a disused leat on a flat footbridge made of railway sleepers (SS 225.358 124.766).

This area of woodland is a plantation known as Sawpit, the actual sawpit was located towards the end of the track, although all trace is now lost. In the valley evidence of the use of water power is visible. If you observe the course of the leat east to the river a substantial stone weir existed here and by the use of sluices water was drawn off. This leat went west along the southern valley side for a distance of around half a mile and fed the overshot wheel at Hartland Mill. Along the leat are large water ponds used as additional storage to assist the actual millpond, which had a restricted site storage area. The weir was washed away following a severe storm having been poorly maintained for many years, thus the leat became dry.

5. Cross the river footbridge and follow the footpath west (left), through the cattle gate/ stile and after 30m take the right hand footpath up through the woods towards Cheristow (SS 225.2 124.796).

This footpath passes through a substantial sunken lane, which appears to lead nowhere. I would suggest this could be the western edge of the deer park and is the remnant of an original track, diverted to create the park. A similar track exists in the earlier deer park, on the south, which was also diverted when the deer park was enclosed. Other paths through the woodlands have been made to allow the extraction of timber, particularly since the onset of mechanisation.

6. Climb this path up through the woods until you reach the stile. Cross into the field and take the footpath along the right edge of the field.

As you reach the top, you will get panoramic views of Harton and its surrounding countryside.

7. Exit the field via the stile into the green lane (SS 225.037 125.071).

This lane is a good example of an early road having been improved at one point by laying rolled stone. It continues west into the valley and emerges at Shopswill by Hartland Abbey Lodge. It was once a primary road within the parish linking the safer high ground from the east with the coast.

8. Ignoring tracks left and right, walk straight ahead and stop just beyond the house named "Quincecote".

On your right the lane has a small 'T' junction. The gateway on the right leads into a small compound, the site of an early chapel of St Wenn (SS 225.098 125.190), which is thought to have been located in the north east corner of this compound. A small number of burials have been discovered within

the compound. The name Cheristow is often put forward as a derivation of 'Christ's Town' and that the site is a very early Christian one, pre-dating that at Stoke.

9. Continue ahead (north) on this track through Cheristow until you reach the staggered crossroads.

You will pass the Lavender Farm which is open March to October (closed Fridays) for teas, lavender goods and plants.

10. At the staggered crossroads turn left, westwards, along the lane.

Walking along this ridge road gives excellent views over the parish of Hartland and beyond. Using a map it would be possible to identify a host of locations and features. Notice the white geodesic dome on the skyline. This houses a military radar system and is located on the redundant R.A.F. radar station, a remnant of Hartland's link with military radar techniques since their inception in the 1940s.

Just west of this radar tower, but unseen, is Hartland Point Lighthouse, and Lundy Island is visible on a clear day 13 miles north. Indeed on very clear days the coast of Wales can be seen, all the way from the Gower as far as Milford Haven. If you look south (left) the skyline is the high ground of Bursdon Moor, a beautiful windswept moor, the site of numerous burial mounds.

11. Continue along the road past Downe Farm (SS 224.483 125.451).

Although no longer an agricultural enterprise, it is one of a declining number that retains part of its shelter woodland, protecting the farm from the prevailing Atlantic winds.

12. Continue west to the road junction then carry straight on towards the coast, signposted Berry.

After a short distance you will reach the entrance to Marcadon Farm (Markadon) (SS 223.809 125.474) (private) on your left which becomes visible through the gateways. Although within the manor of Hartland this farm came into the possession of the monks at Stoke and was used by them as they constructed their new monastery in the valley below. Marcadon is sometimes referred to as the 'Abbey Kitchen', but why is unclear. Marcadon has passed through numerous hands over the centuries and was the subject of a bitter legal dispute regarding ownership. It eventually again became part of the substantial Hartland Abbey Estate until sold away in the mid-20thC. Building works on the roof of the property in recent years disclosed that the thatch was at one point over six feet in depth, and that the chimneys were lengthened to accommodate the increasing layers of straw. The thatch was replaced by slate but the tall chimneys remain. The interior contains many interesting features.

13. Continue west until the signpost marked 'unmetalled road' on your right.

You are now just above Berry Farm on your left, with a fine view of Blegbury Farm (SS 223.135 126.229) on your right.

If you wish, you can take a short diversion by walking down this unmetalled road to visit Blegbury Farm, or simply view it from here.

Much has been written regarding Blegbury mostly in regard to its defensive curtain wall, suggested to date from the civil war period (17thC). As with many of the farms in the parish, Blegbury originally was a collection of smaller holdings, which eventually, through purchase or lease, were amalgamated into one. The Tithe Map of 1864 clearly shows some of the smaller holdings at Blegbury which now lie below the modern agricultural buildings. The farmhouse once contained some fine plaster work on its ceilings and wall friezes. These were lost in a fire and by renovation, but were thought to be by the same craftsmen who produced the fine ceiling at Higher Brownsham Farm, Hartland (owned by the National Trust).

The Atkin family held Blegbury and Downe Farm (which we passed a short while ago) for an extended period and attained high office within the parish. The sons and daughters married into all the prominent local families and they held influence over parish matters for most of the 17thC. Their decline came about because of their ambitions, which eventually ended with bankruptcy and the loss of the properties.

It is hard to understand why the Atkins considered it necessary to protect their property by such defences in the Civil War period; no other Hartland property felt the same need. Although Atkins was engaged in the conflict it was not necessarily at a high level, certainly not at a level to warrant such a structure. Hartland did take defensive action against the threat of rogue Royalist troops from Holsworthy towards the end of the Civil War, and a skirmish is also recorded where a Royalist officer named Osborn was killed. He and a small number of soldiers are said to be buried at Clovelly Church.

It could be argued that Blegbury is one of the few habitations that can be seen from the sea, and thus at threat from what were termed 'Barbary Pirates'. It is also close to an easy beach landing. Other habitations with a similar level of visibility and landing access have wall defences, albeit not as substantial as that at Blegbury.

If you have taken this short diversion then return across the valley, as you climb towards Berry Farm you will be passing through a recently revealed early field system. This has been seen by satellite imagery but as yet is unmapped or researched.

14. Continue south along the road towards Berry Farm.

Berry Farm (SS 223.425 125.335), as with Blegbury, was originally a collection of smaller farming units. Evidence can still be seen in some of the unconverted buildings of at least two dwelling houses. A third on the western extremity was demolished. Visually as you approach Berry from the north the most striking feature is the large earth mound which has been described as a winnowing mound whereby harvested grain would be carried to the top and threshed and by throwing into the air have the chaff removed. On most days at Berry it is not necessary to climb a mound to undertake winnowing!

Recent archaeological work at Berry has shown that the majority of the mound is made up of field stone, demolition rubble and poor soil. Its construction is that of a spoil tipping build-up. It may be that at its core is an older burial mound as these are common throughout the area and would be symbolic of the farm's name, but the question remains as to why would you build a spoil heap in the middle of a usable paddock? Just south of the mound paddock was a large saw pit now filled with domestic rubbish.

Berry House has been the subject of a recent sympathetic renovation (in 2009). The property came to prominence when the orphaned Wolfenston child came into the care of his aunt at Hartland Abbey. As he came of age and married he took on the lease of Berry and transformed it into a house suited to his status. Wolfenston had possibly inherited income from large estates in the Midlands which gave him the finance to transform a traditional farmhouse into his mansion. He became involved in the administration of The Hartland Abbey Estates on behalf of his cousin and amassed a substantial property holding of his own.

The family, after three generations, moved to Bristol where they established further business dealings. Bristol was chosen by many merchants as it was a major trading port, whereas the local ports of Barnstaple and Bideford became silted and less accessible to the larger merchant ships. Berry farmhouse has extensive views south along the coastline towards Cornwall and must have been splendid on a good day. The interior of the house has been restored to its heyday and still shows all the evidence of its former life.

15. Continue along the road through Berry Farm.

Take time to look towards the coastline to see the remains of what appears to be a romantic folly. This is the site of an extensive area of parkland and hunting grounds. The 'folly' is sited in an area called 'The Warren' and recent archaeological work has revealed the existence of a number of artificial rabbit warrens in this area. It is, therefore, likely that the 'folly' was in fact the Warrener's House of the medieval period. The same archaeological work has also revealed a number of early habitations in the cliff top area, some of which are thought to be Bronze Age in date. South across the valley from Berry is the hamlet of Stoke, home to St Nectan's Church which has one of the highest towers in Devon and is known as 'The Cathedral of North Devon'. Continue down the lane until the footpath sign on your left.

At this point you can take a small diversion to view elements of the Hartland Abbey Estate (A) or continue directly with the return route (B).

16A. Continue down the lane into the valley. Near the bottom of the hill and on the right hand side can be seen a small summer house (SS 223.781 125.010), now restored (2010). This was used by Lady Fortescue in the 1940s as a base from which she could write her books. Further down and again on the right is the entrance to the private drive which leads to Blackpool Mill. This can be accessed by purchasing a gardens ticket at Hartland Abbey during the opening season. Blackpool Mill cottage has been used for a number of film locations, more recently Sense and Sensibility, Shell Seekers, The Shout and the whole valley as a location for the series Hercules. The entrance to Hartland Abbey parkland is on the left, but is not the preferred public access point.

The Abbey (SS 224.046 124.908) was an Augustinian monastery until the Dissolution, being one of the last to be surrendered to the Crown. Since then it has remained in the ownership of descendants of the Abbott family, never having been sold. Viewed from the west the Abbey now displays the Queen Anne styled extensions on the southern end and elements of the Strawberry Hill Gothic style across the main building range. A large walled garden once extended west from the main building range complete with water fountains, and a large stable complex ran against the hillside on its northern side. Both were demolished and a small deerpark established.

The road now crosses the valley floor and over a bridge on the Abbey river. From this bridge on the east can be seen the Abbey fishpond, note a small number of stones visible on an island within the pond. This is the traditional burial ground for all the Abbey dogs, a tradition carried on to this day. The road now climbs the valley side towards Stoke, on the left it is just possible to make out an earlier track, often called the 'Monk's Path' being a more direct walking access towards the church.

The road itself is a fine example of a sunken lane and shows evidence of having been lowered a number of times to ease the gradient for wheeled vehicles. This aspect is particularly evident at the top where hedges and tracks can be seen on both sides of the present road.

Now retrace your route and take the marked footpath and continue as at (B).

16B. Take this footpath across the fields and stop in the last field when you reach the standing stone.

Look around and see how many others you can see within the neighbouring landscape. A recent investigation has revealed that over thirty-two such stones were sited on the Hartland Abbey Barton. Many were removed in the 1950s during a post-war drive for agricultural efficiency but research has revealed where a number of the removed stones are now reused as lintels, well covers or gate posts.

17. Continue across the field until you reach the road at Shopswill Hill. Walk down the hill, taking care on the road, until you reach the walled garden of Hartland Abbey and the Lodge.

Hartland Abbey carriage drive entrance is on your right.

18. Continue along the road for about 50m until you see a signed footpath on the left heading eastwards and along the base of the valley.

You will pass a white cottage called Glen Cottage, until recently the home of the Head Gardener of the Abbey and previously a water mill, evidence of which can be found in the woods against the garage building. Follow the footpath east noticing along the valley Hartland Mill (SS 224.837 124.741) on the south valley side, a water mill active until the 1950s, with the large building further south of the mill being the site of Hartland's Workhouse. In the woods further east of Hartland Mill are the derelict remains of a substantial workshop complex that once served the greater Abbey Estate.

19. Continue on this footpath until you reach a gate and stile. Cross the stile, bear right and return to Hartland on the footpath past the Observatory which was the earlier part of this walk.

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

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

All available from www.hartlandpeninsula.co.uk



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