



# The Heritage Trail Series

## The Harton Borough 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 one mile exploring how the borough town of Harton came to be.

It is a level, flat walk on good surfaces suitable for pushchairs and wheelchairs. There are toilets, including disabled toilets, by the main car park where the walk begins, and also shops, cafes and pubs for refreshments, and interesting galleries and potteries to visit.

**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.**

### Introduction

There has been a habitation at Hartland for a considerable time and is attested by its mention in the wills of Saxon Royalty, mentioned within the Domesday Survey and that it formed the named location for an extensive 'hundred' administrative area.

The transition from rural habitation into a formal borough town came with the desire for status by the Dinham family who gained the Lordship of Hartland by the 12thC. The Dinhams were a prominent Norman family originally recognised as holding English property on the Exe Estuary (Nutwell) and rose over four centuries to hold office at the highest national level.

The Dinhams having gained the Lordship of Hartland set about an ambitious scheme of enhancement in the medieval style and included all the requisites of a high status estate: deer parks, borough town (Harton), markets, hunting and religious establishments. As the family rose in status they relocated to South Devon, first Kingskerswell then returning to Nutwell; the major part of the parish of Hartland became effectively a Barton Farm for the Dinham family.

The Dinhams died out in the male line in the 16thC and the estate was then divided, this also corresponded with changes brought by the Dissolution of Monasteries and within a period of 50 years the style of land ownership and governance for the parish dramatically changed.

### 1. The walk starts from the main car park off Hartland Square (SS 225.915 124.442).

Until the creation of the car park this was a walled garden belonging to the Vicarage, now Charter House sited on the left of the car park entrance, the established vicarage having been sold into private hands and a new vicarage erected in the grounds.

### 2. Take the footpath exit at east end of the car park through the wide arch into the sheltered housing complex.

This complex was built in stages over the last forty years on the site of burgess land plots. As you walk east the small footpath running off south is known as Well Lane and is the site of a set of four Alms Houses provided in the 17thC for the use of poor widows. This alms-house site was established in exchange for property on what became the site of the Parish Poor House (Workhouse) sited approximately one mile west of Harton. The Alms

Houses were considered for improvement in the 1960s but due to cost it was decided demolition and new build was the economic method. There is a plaque set in the wall of the southernmost bungalow describing the original endowment.

### 3. Continue straight ahead (east) through the housing complex, into Pynes Close and take the footpath on the right hand side to the road.

When you reach the road, look to your left (north) and you will see the present Hartland Primary School (SS 226.082 124.447). This can be seen from its architectural style to be based on a typical Devon National School type, established as an all age school before being reduced into a primary school in the 1960s then all over 11s being bussed to Bideford or Bude for their secondary education.

Looking east over the housing development it should be appreciated that a certain amount of road realignment has taken place to allow for traffic flows. This estate was built over a sizable area of medieval strip fields these being the closest to the borough town. No recording or investigation was required of the field systems before their destruction although the reconstruction of their layout can be gained from the Tithe Map of 1864. This system of strip fields continued as far as Rosedown (approximately one mile east of Harton) and south along South Lane (adjacent to the Methodist Chapel) with each property along the main street of Harton also having a 'back' strip. The standard width at Hartland of a burgage strip was sixteen feet four inches.

### 4. Turn right, then right again (south) at the signpost, and continue on until the main street.

You are now on Fore Street.

5. Walk left (east) up the street to see a number of interesting sites. Shortly on your left is the present site of the Small School. The building was once a non-conformist chapel and contained the chapel, a school room and, on the left, a caretaker's cottage. Slightly further along is a property called Pentreath (a private house), which was the site of the earliest established non-conformist chapel in Harton. Further and on your right is the present United Methodist Church (SS 226.248 124.286), which drew together a number of the strands of non-conformity. It was built by Messers S. Cann on the site of a licensed non-conformist burial ground. Previously all burials were at St Nectan's church, Stoke.

Return the way you came and on the left beyond the Methodist Church you pass a group of houses known as Gregory Terrace, one of the first social housing developments in Hartland and named after a very well respected vicar of Hartland, the Reverend Prebendary Ivon Gregory who wrote much on local history and is known for his publication of the Hartland Church Accounts (1597-1706). The large building at the end of Gregory Terrace is Beech House, once a grocery shop with a bakery, and the adjacent building was an early motor car repair garage and petrol vendor.

### 6. Walk on towards the main street (Fore Street)

On your left the grassed area at the "T" junction is the site of the 'Hartland Gate' (SS 226.099 124.323) which was a tollhouse on the road from Hartland Quay to Twinaways, Bideford that the local 'squire' Col. Orchard had promoted. First local mention of this gate is within the farm accounts of John Vine of Pattard Farm, who includes an amount he allowed his driver 'Colwill' to pay for an annual pass for the Harton Gate for a cart and livestock, dated 1760. The last building on the site, the 'Toll House', was demolished as part of a road widening programme.

Go south down the hill to where the road crosses the river. This is the site of a bridge over a tributary of the Abbey river. This is the first bridge mentioned within written records of the borough, in the 17thC, with a cost of repair - and fines for those who failed to contribute their labour!

When you reach the bridge look to the right (west) of the bridge structure where you can see the stone remains of a wartime barrage gate intended to allow water to be collected for fire fighting purposes. A second such gate exists at Pattard Water on the north of Harton.

## 7. Return to Fore Street.

The range of buildings running west from the Anchor Inn until Well Lane, which is on the right as you look down the street at the end of the Quay railings, are a mixture of commercial and residential properties and have been in constant flux over the years. There are fewer commercial premises today than even forty years ago.

Worth mention is the area immediately opposite the 'T' junction. The low two storey cottage was the site of a blacksmith forge for many years, last held by Henry Conibear, whose children relocated to larger premises at Ford Farm before closing to become mobile farriers.

On the left (west) of the old forge is a large house now known as Troy. This property is on the site of Troy Farm which was in the possession of the Church and was one of a small number of church properties which were the subject of dispute following the Reformation. It was felt that the church had contrived to hide its assets from the commissioners. But in fact, the properties were out on long tenancies and the church did not regain them until long after the reformation commissioners had gone. The farm was divided and a series of cottages were built for use by the poor. Notes in the church accounts and those of the Poor Law Commissioners recount how work was provided for the 'poor persons' housed in these cottages by way of wool combing, rather than being admitted into the poor house. The cottages burnt down when the thatch caught fire, the right hand (eastern most) cottage was never rebuilt and its location is now a small garden area. Within the complex of buildings that form Heard's Garage are the remains of a further non-conformist chapel. A number of cottages and shops were demolished when what was a carriers business changed to a motor garage and expanded. And in 2011, this area is about to be further redeveloped.

**Points to note on Fore Street:** the area from Well Lane east is considered to be at the outer edge of the earlier settlement of Harton, although documents are sparse to show which and how many properties existed. Certainly the farms of Troy and one opposite Gregory Terrace are well recorded, but the period until the 17thC is fairly silent. It is known from the borough accounts that the main street had its pavements and roads remade in cobbles from the mid 17thC and one could consider that the high pavement, known as 'The Quay', was built to take in what must have been an inclined verge during this period. The style of building on the south side of the street could be considered as earlier in character than that on the north, and house deeds seem to support this. From Well Lane westward the building style is indicative of an early period of layout and often conforms to the previously mentioned 16' 4" burgess plot.

## 8. Walk along to and up Well Lane on the right (at the end of the railings).

This is the site of one of the two main water sources for the town. The well existed on the east side (right hand as you walk up) close to the then entrance to the Alms Houses previously mentioned (SS 226.015 124.424). The importance of these water sources is well recorded in the Borough accounts, with considerable sums being spent on their repair and improvements. The last well was removed by the District Council, but the well was not sealed and water continues to flow down the lane to this day. The Catholic Church in Well Lane was established by a dedicated band of believers who had previously met in private houses, and later the Women's Institute Hall, with a visiting missionary priest taking services. They collected sufficient money from various enterprises to allow the purchase of land and a prefabricated wooden structure which, with care, has served their congregation for nearly 50 years, but has now been closed by the Bishop of Plymouth. Opposite the entrance to the Catholic Church are the remains of a block of agricultural buildings now converted to holiday use, these were at one time the slaughter house serving the butchers shop on Fore Street.

## 9. Return to Fore Street, walk westwards (to your right).

Again, the mix of commercial and residential properties has frequently interchanged over the years. Of mention is the site now known as the 'Handy

Store'. The thatched building originally on this site protruded into the street and was the town library, maintained by the borough and later the Harton Town Trust. It was demolished to widen the road and the present building erected. Opposite the 'library' site was the premises of Burrow & Co, note the sign embedded into the porch canopy. This was the location of a shop run by the Burrows family and the printing works for Thomas Cory-Burrow who established the Hartland & West Country Chronicle, becoming known world wide as the 'one man newspaper'. The 'Chronicle' ran from the late 19thC until 1946 and 'Cory' produced in excess of 490 issues which have become a valuable source of information on the locality in those times.

The large double fronted house immediately west (left) of 'Cory's Press' existed as both a Temperance Hotel and a Steam Bakery run by the Fitzgerald family. Opposite this and next door to the Handy Store is now a grocery shop called The Pop-In, for many years run by the Westlake family. They were well known for being in at the early stages of electric appliances, wireless sets, accumulator charging, as well as shoes, bicycles, petrol and the numerous essentials of life. The shop became known for the proprietress Miss Ruby Westlake who, being short of stature, could only just peer over the top of her counter. The small lane at the side of The Pop-In is called Calf Street and allegedly was used to tie up young calves for auction on market days. A small building at the end of this lane housed Mrs Bailey's Fish and Chip Shop, called The Jamaica Cafe (named after the warship on which her son served). This was later taken over by Mr Henry Mitchell, Postmaster, who established a printing business there, taking forward the name to become Jamaica Press. They in turn have recently relocated to larger industrial premises away from Hartland.

## 10. Continue walking until you reach the war memorial and Harton Square (SS 225.898 124.420).

Here, we enter the heart of the town. In its present format this square held the local market, housed the town hall and shambles and became the focal point of village life. The prominent building is now St John's Arts & Music Centre. Originally, it was a chapel of ease for St Nectan's church at Stoke, built under the supervision of Reverend Chanter in the mid-19thC on the site of the last town hall. St John's houses one of the oldest working civic clocks in the country, built and installed during the 17thC, which still chimes the hour. The original town hall used to hold borough functions. It contained a number of rooms and off-chambers and, below the hall, a small number, thought to be six, of areas for use by butchers, fish sellers etc in a shambles. Within the building was the Tome Stone upon which deals were agreed and sealed. An earlier town hall was located on the site of the adjacent house (north side) and an even earlier hall adjacent to what is now the public toilets. Little is known of these earlier structures but mention is made within documents of their existence.

Opposite St John's (east), at what is now a private dwelling, is the site of a second church farm (Troy Farm previously mentioned) which became known as Cole Farm, but earlier was Coul House. It is possible that this was the location for the storage of the Coul or ducking stool, or later the tumbrel cart, both devices for punishment. The borough was continually fined for their lack of upkeep of these devices.

Walk Behind St John's on the west side to see a row of cottages in Chapel Street. These belong to Harton Town Trust and are some of the oldest cottages with a documented history. In the small paved area at the north end of the cottages were found the remains of the Bull Pit. The stake and chain were uncovered during the laying of drains, but unfortunately never photographed or recorded. However, the process of Bull Baiting is well documented at Hartland.

Walk back towards the lower side of the Square.

This part is the site of an earlier chapel, dedicated to St Andrew, a pub called The Black Horse and a mysterious building known as the 'Great Kitchen', thought to be where the present Kings Arms is. If you walk along to your right (west) the oblong of buildings on your right which make up the Town Trust Cottages, the public toilets and new houses built on the old Huggins Brothers motor repair garage, have previously revealed a sequence of house foundations and small streets.

## 11. Continue walking west and to Springfield (SS 225.804 124.399).

You are now entering what may well have been the original centre of the habitation of Harton. The oblong of houses between Springfield and West Street was an open grassed area until the late 19thC. The grass area and the

evidence of cottages on all sides, falls within the classic description of early settlements. Springfield was one of the areas used for markets and fairs, it having pens erected for the sale of cattle, sheep, pigs etc. A small cobbled street off Springfield, to your left, is known as Threadneedle Street reputedly due to the presence of ladies who were engaged in dressmaking, or more likely weaving, living in these houses. Springfield was the home to an early school. Later the building became the Women's Institute Hall when the County School opened. The W. I. recently sold this hall due to ever rising costs and it is now in private hands. The western end of Springfield was agricultural in use but is now an access gate into The Vale and two fine houses. An 18thC document in the possession of Harton Town Trust is an agreement between Paul Orchard of Hartland Abbey and the Borough whereby he leases, for 3000 years, a farm, cottages and the Bowling Green, which may have been the grassed area. This enabled him to demolish the farm to allow his new carriage drive to emerge from the woodland valley into the centre of the town, where the access gate is now. This carriage drive is the subject of a further walk in this series: Walk 2, the Parkland Walk.

**Walk up the once-cobbled street, Colwill Street, at the west end of Springfield which crosses into West Street.** It passes Springfield Pottery, run by Philip Leach, grandson of the famous Bernard Leach who established the influential studio pottery in St Ives. The Colwill family from whom the street is named were traders in the town having businesses also at North Road and within Fairfield House, which later became Huggins Brothers Garage. Fairfield House was also previously the home of the Cann family who ran a haberdashery business from the premises. After the death of Mr & Mrs Cann (senior) the family moved north to Bristol and later Liverpool, taking their entire stock with them. One of the sons was an established photographer and fortunately a large collection of his work remains. The small open area at the end of Colwill Street once was the site of the 'Lime House' and a weigh scale for use with the markets. Houses on the north of West Street would have faced onto the grassed area and had burgess plots at their rear.

## 12. When you reach West Street, turn left (west).

Walk a short distance where you will see a little road running left off West Street, a small cul-de-sac known as Wesley Terrace. If you walk down here you will see the three cottages on the south of this street were the result of the conversion of the earlier Wesleyan Chapel once on the site. The land was donated to the non-conformists by a member of the Prust family, who, although a strong church person, believed in religious freedom, and supported the Wesleyans in their desire to have a prayer house.

## 13. Go right to the end of this cul-de-sac at the gate and face west.

You are looking out over the site of an early medieval deer park established by the Dinham family. A second park was created slightly later by the family, abutting this park on its northern edge and stretching across the valley (north). The mystery at Hartland is the location of a house of substance in which the Lords of the Manor, the Dinhams, would have lived. Some favour a property (The Lodge) thought to have been located in the woodland through which Paul Orchard's carriage drive later passed, others favour such as the hamlet of Cheristow or even Blegberry. However, documents have recently shown that the 'Lodge' was a park-keeper's lodge, but that a property known as the Great House did exist and, from locative research, appears to have been in the area of Wesley Terrace. This seems appropriate as it would have given the Dinhams views over their high status estate and yet placed them at the centre of their borough town. However, further research is needed before we can confidently state that this was the location of the Dinham's residence.

## 14. Retrace your steps then walk to the end of West Street and take the path to the right of the last house, onto the tennis courts and playing fields.

The Playing Fields were, more recently, the site of the modern cattle market. There were sheep pens at the west end (which have been replaced by the tennis courts), then a sale ring and a weighbridge, and lastly cattle pens (under the site of the play area and the pavilion building). There was also a shed and compounds for pigs against the eastern boundary. The Pavilion building was erected as a community hall during the 1960s and originated as an officers' building from the defunct American military base at Morwenstow, now the C.S.O.S. site. It was taken apart on a very misty day, transported back to Hartland on trailers and re-erected on this site, all by volunteers.

## 15. Pass the Pavilion and leaving the Playing Fields. Turn right (south) into North Street.

The area now covered by the British Legion car park was the site of the Town Pound, a small enclosure into which unattended stray animals were placed until collection by their owners on payment of a fine. From the Pound looking south (straight ahead) early photographs show a range of dwellings and workshops, at one time the traders Colwills operated from some of these premises. The dwellings, and also some sited in Natcott Lane, were described as some of the most appalling ever visited by the Health Inspector. He quoted families living in overcrowded rooms and sleeping with views of the night sky.

## 16. Walk along the street and turn left (east) at the top of North Street.

The range of buildings on your left is known as The Manor House. This has been the home of the Prust family for many generations and they held numerous positions of authority within the area. How and when it became titled The Manor House is unknown. There is no documentary evidence to suggest this to be the case, and it may be that it assumed the name more recently as a matter of status. However, from these premises the Prust family ran a tannery business, the only one recorded in the area. It was an oak bark tannery and until the recent conversion of the outbuildings the tannery facilities were easily visible. Today you can see a large granite wheel resting against the end of the present workshop. Many think this to be from a corn mill but if you look closely you will see there are no indentations on the flat surfaces but that the wheel edge is serrated. This wheel would have run upright in a circular trough and been driven by a horse. Into the trough would be placed the bark from oak trees and the wheel would crush the bark to release the tannin. The skins to be treated would pass through a series of troughs containing ingredients such as lime, urine or dog excrement, before being hung to dry in a room with slatted openings, which allowed air to pass through but not sunlight. The purchase of bark from local farms and the sale of leather by the Prust Tannery, and a side product, the sale of hair by the bushel for use in the building trades, are well documented within local records. As is the behaviour of the tanner who was regularly held responsible for the maintenance of illegitimate children in the town!

## 17. Continue east past the front of The Manor House. You will now have returned to the vicinity of car park.

**This is the end of the Harton Borough Heritage Walk. We hope you enjoyed it.**

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

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