



eyemouth
town trail

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Eyemouth is a busy fishing port with many interesting buildings and a fascinating history that includes smuggling, shipwrecks and witch-burning. The aim of the Town Trail is to show the visitor to Eyemouth how the town's buildings are closely linked with its heritage, and to provide a flavour of its development through time.

The Trail is approximately 3km/ 2 miles long and takes about two hours to complete. Those with less time to spare may wish to reduce this by referring to the Trail map in the centre pages.

In order to guide the visitor, plaques have been sited along the route of the Trail at specific points of interest and information relating to them can be found within this leaflet. Some of the sites on the Trail are houses and we would ask you to respect the owners' privacy.

If you would like to find out more about the history of Eyemouth and the surrounding area, the Museum shop carries a wide range of books, maps and leaflets.

We hope you will enjoy walking around the Town Trail and trust that you will have a pleasant stay in Eyemouth.

Scottish Borders Council would like to thank the following for their help in producing this booklet:



*Eyemouth and East Berwickshire Partnership,
Mr Peter Aitchison, Eyemouth University of the
Third Age and the Gunsgreen House Trust.*

Front Cover Photograph © John McNeill

historical background

The town of Eyemouth was established as a port and fishing village to serve Coldingham Priory, which is some 8km/ 5 miles to the north. The town is first documented in the late 12th century when two house-plots in Eyemouth, the port of Coldingham Priory, were given to the Priory by Edward of Lastelrig. Around this date there were only twenty-five houses with gardens in the village and nine of them were unoccupied. In the late 14th century the Priory kept fishing lines, two large fishing boats, a small fishing boat, a skiff and a coble each with four oars at Eyemouth. The Priory, whose remains are open to the public (access to the church during the summer only), also used the port to bring in building materials including timber and lead from Holy Island and levied tolls on the use of the port by others.

Eyemouth came to have strategic importance as the most southerly haven in Scotland after the loss of Berwick-upon-Tweed to the English in 1482. Because of this, Fort

Point, the promontory above the town was fortified successively by English invaders and then by French forces acting on behalf of the Scottish Crown in the mid-16th century. The town was chartered as a Burgh of Barony in 1597-8, which entitled the inhabitants to hold markets and to buy and sell merchandise subject to the tolls and customs exacted by the lord of the Barony of Coldingham. It is likely that the town developed because of this change in status and the return of peace to the Border with the Union of Crowns in 1603, when, following the death of Queen Elizabeth I, King James VI of Scotland claimed the English throne. A market place that was established at the east end of the High Street most likely dates to this time.

In the early 17th century Eyemouth was elevated to the status of a parish, and by 1695 the population had risen to 304 persons, excluding the poor who were not counted. It was also a bleak time for Eyemouth as more than two dozen men, women and

children were burnt as witches on the beach. In the following century, two factors helped the development of the town. Firstly, in 1763 the common fields of the parish were enclosed and divided which allowed the introduction of modern methods of farming and improved productivity. Secondly, the harbour was improved by the construction of stone piers on the west and east sides of the entrance in 1747 and 1769 respectively. These improvements led to increased trade, particularly in corn, and encouraged wholesale merchants in imported goods to set up in the town.

The fishing industry was still relatively undeveloped with only six working crews at the turn of the 19th century. Their chief concern was providing the hinterland with herring, although the surplus, as red or white herring (smoked or salted), was sent to London and abroad. Despite the new piers, the harbour was poorly protected from northerly gales, there being no inner harbour bar, so it had no secure harbour for a large fishing fleet. Further developments were made to the harbour during the first half of

the 19th century which provided the basis for the subsequent dramatic development of the fishing industry.

However, disaster struck on Friday 14th October 1881, when 189 east coast fishermen perished, 129 of them from Eyemouth. The fleet had sailed to the fishing grounds in brilliant sunshine, but without warning a violent storm broke and only a few made it back to safety, many perishing within sight of their families waiting anxiously on the shore. It took almost 100 years for the town's population to return to the level it had been before 'Black Friday', and further improvements that had been planned for the harbour were cancelled.

Today, the town is the 7th largest in the Borders and the community is proud of its rich heritage. The Herring Queen Festival, which is held annually in July, is a week-long celebration of the fishing industry and the town's history. The Festival started in 1936, celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2004 (it was suspended during the Second World War).

eyemouth town trail

THE AULD KIRK

The Auld Kirk is the start and finish point of the Town Trail. It was built by Alexander Gilkie in 1812 as Eyemouth Parish Church for the Church of Scotland. The first minister

evidently had mixed opinions

of the building, as he

commented, "We

cannot say much

of the taste which

its external

appearance

indicates; but

we may add,

that it is one

of the most

comfortable

places of worship

in this part of

the country". The

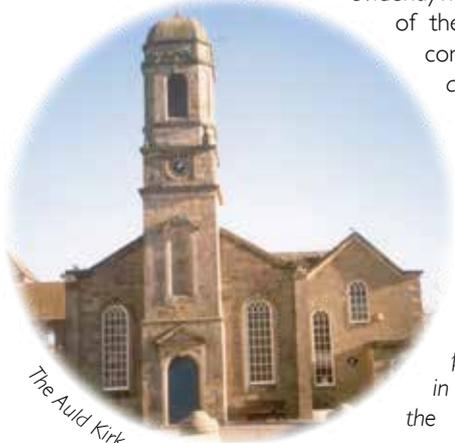
consecration of the

church was not without incident,

as a drunken smuggler John Dangerfield

appeared on the scene challenging all present

to a fight!



The Auld Kirk

However, during the Great Tithes Dispute in the middle of the 19th century, when protests were organised against a tax levied by the Kirk, few fishermen went across its step. Most married at Lamberton Toll, a few miles to the south and few bothered with a christening.

The previous Parish Church stood in Market Place and when it was demolished, skeletons were found about two feet below floor level. This is an indication that, as was common practice in earlier times, the church had been used as a place of burial.

In 1981, the Auld Kirk was converted into a Museum and Visitor Information Centre. This coincided with the centenary of the 1881 Fishing Disaster: As well as housing exhibitions about local history, the Museum is also home to the Eyemouth Tapestry, a magnificent work measuring 4.5m/15ft long and incorporating nearly a million stitches, which was created by local residents in commemoration to the victims of the Disaster.

From the Auld Kirk, turn left down Manse Road towards the Harbour.

At the end of Manse Road is the quayside and what was formerly known as Salt Greens. Here herring were landed, gutted and salted in barrels by fisher lassies. A left turn brings you on to the Old Quay. When the fishing fleet is in, the quay is a hive of activity with fish boxes, nets and floats littering the walkways. **Extreme care should be taken when walking on the quayside, especially near ropes and wire hawsers.**

Modern fishing boats powered by diesel engines seem much less romantic than the earlier sailing 'Fifies' or 'Zulus' but are unquestionably more efficient and safer, being fitted with radios and navigation aids. Each boat displays a registration mark, which consists of letters indicating the port of registration (e.g. BK = Berwick, LH = Leith) and an individual number for the boat.

Continue along the Old Quay towards the beach.

Registration Marks

AH Arbroath	FR Fraserburgh	PD Peterhead
BF Banff	INS Inverness	SD Sunderland
BK Berwick	LH Leith	SN North Shields
BH Blyth	LK Lerwick	WK Wick
BCK Buckie	ME Montrose	

THE SHIP HOTEL

Buildings along the quayside date from the early 18th century with some later additions. One of the earliest of these is the Ship Hotel, with its gables facing the harbour, one of which is Dutch in character, the remainder being distinctly Scottish.



The Ship Hotel

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THE FISHERMEN'S MISSION

Immediately adjacent to the Ship Hotel is a former granary, nicknamed the Hippodrome by 19th century fishermen because they used to hold impromptu concerts there. Built in 1846, it was renovated in the 1980s to provide premises for the Royal National Mission To Deep Sea Fishermen, which still provides a place to stay for visiting fishermen.



Fishermen's Mission

Look over the harbour towards GungreenHouse and the Lifeboat Station. James Adam designed the House along Palladian lines in 1755, and this is perhaps one of the best views of any building in the Borders. Past Gungreen House can be seen the newly constructed fishmarket.

The lights at the harbour entrance are very carefully positioned to guide incoming boats. When lined up, they indicate the safest passage into the harbour.

Continue along the quayside towards the beach and turn left into Marine Parade.

MARINE PARADE AND THE SEAFRONT

Marine Parade has a fine example of a modern housing development that retains much of the scale and character of the local area. From Marine Parade it is just a short distance to the Old Town, through winding vennels. As in most coastal communities, smuggling was rife during the 18th century and the apparently disorganised layout of the narrow streets was well suited to this clandestine trade.

"Imagine a moonless night...a small boat stealthily sliding into the harbour...silent dark forms appearing on the quay-side ready to tie up the boat and quickly unload the precious cargo. A shout and the sound of running feet disturbs

the night. Torches flare along the quay as the discharge of a pistol shatters the silence. The silent figures shoulder the cargo and disappear into the maze of wynds and vennels. By the time the excise men have reached the spot, the boat has slipped its moorings and merged with the darkness...another night's work complete".

Most houses would have had their secret storage places and, it is traditionally thought, underground passages linked many buildings. It has been said that there was more of Eyemouth below ground than above. Sadly, much of the Old Town has been demolished to make way for modern buildings.

Now walk towards the town's beach along the sea front, called The Bantry.

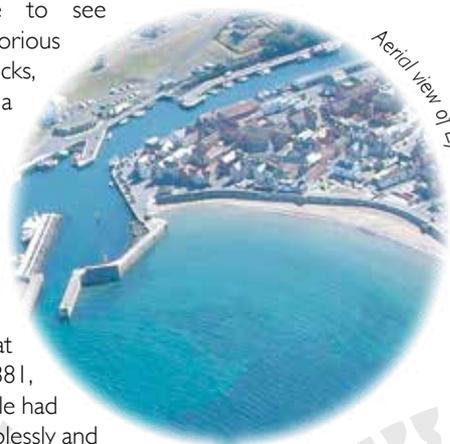
The town's beach is sandy and popular with locals and visitors, but it disappears completely at high tide. **Please do not walk your dogs on the beach.**

In the 17th century, Eyemouth was one of the major Scottish centres of witch mania. At least two dozen women and several men were found guilty of witchcraft, usually

accused by neighbours for no other reason than bad fortune had befallen the community. They would be kept in the Common Pitt (Eyemouth did not have a jail) until being burned at the stake along the foreshore.

THE BANTRY

From the mid point of The Bantry, it is possible to see Eyemouth's notorious Hurkur Rocks, which pose a great hazard to fishing boats, especially at high tide when most of the rocks are covered by the sea. In the Great Disaster of 1881, the townspeople had to stand by helplessly and watch as much of the town's fishing fleet was dashed against these rocks, with great loss of life. Yet despite the danger, the Hurkurs also provide shelter to the approach to the harbour and river mouth.



Aerial view of Eyemouth

In the bay eider duck are often present and occasionally grey seal can be seen bobbing in the water. When the tide is out, rockpools are revealed which are well worth exploring for shore and hermit crabs, sea anemones, winkles, whelks, limpets and many more marine animals and seaweeds. **Please take care, the rocks can be very slippery and do not be caught out by the rising tide.**



Coastguards' Cottages

To the North, the cliffs below the old fort can appear dark and forbidding, a death trap for the unwary sailor. However, on 'Black Friday' in 1881, one crew at least was thankful to see the rocks at Fort Point:

"Later in the day, the 'Pilgrim' was driven into the bay. Hers was a remarkable escape, for with one wave she was thrown on to the rock at the Fort Point and was lifted with another clean over Black Carr and pitched almost high and dry on the shore. With the aid of lines her crew was all saved".

COASTGUARDS' COTTAGES

At the far end of The Bantry, to the right of Eyemouth's leisure centre, is a row of houses. These were the Coastguards' Cottages until the present Coastguard Station was built at the top of the cliff behind the houses. Where the private house stands to the north of these cottages stood a building commonly known as the 'Barracks', which seems to have been used for housing militia men in the Napoleonic war of 1803-14.

During a cholera epidemic in 1849, when more than 100 people out of the town's population of 1400 died, the 'Barracks' was used as a temporary hospital. The building was demolished early in the 20th century, though the remains of the gable-end wall now serve as a sea wall. This can be seen on

established near the tip of the peninsula. During the Second World War, an anti-aircraft battery was set up here. On a clear day, there are stunning views across the bay and the town as well as north to St Abbs Head, which is maintained by the National Trust for Scotland and open to the public.

The cliffs at Fort Point are also home to nesting fulmars and herring gulls. Thrift (sea pink), bird's foot trefoil, sea campion and purple milk vetch all grow on the windswept cliff tops. Common blue and grayling butterflies can be seen here on warm summer days, as well as migrant butterflies such as painted lady and red admiral. Out to sea in summer you may see long lines of gannets flying to or from the Bass Rock at the entrance to the



Smoke House

Forth Estuary which is their nearest breeding site.

From Fort Point it is possible to follow The Coast Path to Coldingham, a distance of some 8km/5 miles. If you wish to continue around the Town Trail you should return along the cliff path and past the new Coastguard Station (on your right) to Fort Road.

On the right as you head down Fort Road is Barefoots Estate, which is named after a battle which is reputed to have been fought here in 1557 between the Scots and the English, when the French were working on the fort. The Scots are said to have been awoken in the early morning by the sea birds. This alerted them to the approach of the English, and they successfully defended their position, although they had to fight in their bare feet.

SMOKE HOUSE

Turn left at the foot of Fort Road into High Street and you will see a small smoke house on the left, located to the rear of the Fish Merchant. Where the car park now stands

used to be a warren of vennels and wynds and later on, the town's gas works. Their demolition has greatly changed the face and character of the town.

Continue along the High Street into town.

OLD CEMETERY

Opposite the car park is the Old Cemetery, which can be accessed via a set of steps from either High Street or Albert Road. This is an extraordinary place which became full of cholera epidemic victims in 1849 when more than 100 people died in only six weeks. As a result the cemetery had to be relevelled. The level was raised by about two metres and a new cemetery was made on top of the old one, the vertical gravestones being used to build up the retaining wall of the elevated section and the horizontal stones simply buried. Some of the inscriptions on the vertical stones are still legible. The cemetery has since been cleared of tombstones.

To the right on entering the cemetery from High Street, is an old Watch-House, partially concealed by bushes, whose walls

incorporate many tombstones. This replaced an earlier watch-house on the other side of the entrance which was removed when the cemetery was re-layered. These watch-houses were used by guards on the lookout for 'body-snatchers' who were known to be at work in the area.

THE MEMORIAL

The Memorial in the centre of the cemetery, depicting a broken mast, is dedicated to the memory of the fishermen lost in the Great Disaster.

Above the cemetery is Albert Road. The houses here date from the 19th century and were built by the more affluent members of the community.



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Continue along High Street past Spiers Place and Armatage Street to the Old Parish School and Schoolhouse.

OLD PARISH SCHOOL AND SCHOOLHOUSE

There are several examples of fine old buildings in High Street, including the Old Parish School and Schoolhouse on the corner of Armatage Street.

Built in 1819, they were designed by Alexander Gilkie who also built the Auld Kirk.

At the end of High Street and the start of Market Place is a splendid example of art deco architecture which shows just how diverse the architecture of

the town is. In the front of the building is a statue of Willie Spears who led the local fishermen's protests of 1855-1864 called the Great Tithes Dispute. These protests were against tithes, a form of tax (equal to one tenth of the value of the boat's catch) levied by the Kirk. Eventually, the disputes were settled when the tithes were abolished by an Act of Parliament.



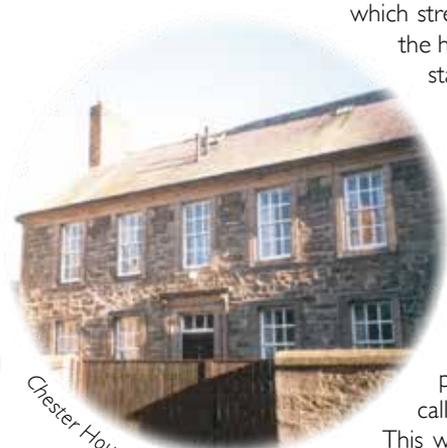
Willie Spears



Old Parish School and Schoolhouse

CHESTER HOUSE

Number 11 Church Street is also known as Chester House. A mid-18th century building, this was a town house for the owners of Chesterbank Farm which is located above the nearby village of Burnmouth. The stables stood at the harbour side and the house had a walled garden



Chester House

which stretched from the house to the stables. Later buildings now cover the site of the garden.

DUNDEE HOUSE

On Harbour Road is an 18th century pantile roofed house called Dundee House.

This was the home of the Willis family who built the tea clipper "Cutty Sark" in 1869. Their son, John, became the ship's Captain, although he did not live in the house.



Dundee House

Opposite is the Coastal Marine Boat Builders Ltd. A boatyard has been operating in Eyemouth since at least 1800, when it was located above the rise of the beach. When it outgrew that site, it was moved to its present location, at Brownsbank, over the Eye Water.

In 1867 the firm became known as "James Weatherhead" and was very highly esteemed:

"The local boatyard became famous for the good work produced; indeed, the fishermen used to say with regard to their boats, so great was their confidence in Mr Weatherhead's workmanship: 'Wun'cudna'blaw, nor sea rin tae dae them harm'".

Time has seen a great change in the size of fishing boats, from the 7m/ 22ft long cobbles and 7.5m/ 25ft yawls used in the 1840s to the 21-24m/ 70-80ft motor fishing vessels of today. The Boatyard still manufactures and repairs boats, including maintaining RNLI Lifeboats.

When the doors of the workshop are open it is possible to see boats being worked on inside.



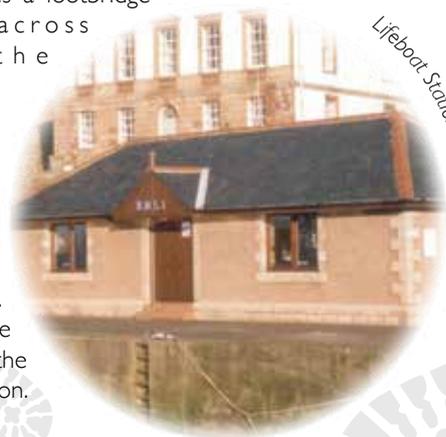
New Quay

Outside the boatyard sits "Bertha" the first steam driven water craft in the country. This boat was built in the 1840s at Isambard Kingdom Brunel's works at Bristol for use in the Bridgewater Canal. There are plans to restore Bertha to her former glory as part of a collection of vessels that is now kept in Eyemouth.

NEW QUAY

Walk along New Quay which was built in 1843 and separates the Main Harbour from the Eye Water. This forms a channel which leads to the boatyard. Boats using the boatyard slipway are moved along this narrow channel, known as 'The Cut'. At the seaward end of the Middle Pier is a footbridge across the

Cut to the opposite side of the harbour. Cross the bridge to the Lifeboat Station.



Lifeboat Station

LIFEBOATSTATION

There has been a Lifeboat Station at Eyemouth since 1876, the first lifeboat being the rowing lifeboat "James and Rachel

Grindlay". Tragically, the lifeboat could not be launched on Black Friday, 14th October 1881, as its crew were fishermen and so were already at sea.

A lifeboat house and slipway were constructed in 1876 but were replaced by a new station in 1908. These became obsolete with the harbour improvements in the 1960s and were removed as part of the most recent harbour upgrading. Since 1964, a modern lifeboat has been moored in the harbour ready to sail at a moment's notice, the crew being summoned by one, two or three rockets, depending on the seriousness of the situation facing them. The new Station was completed in 1992.



Gungreen House

GUNSGREEN HOUSE

Continue along this side of the harbour to reach Gungreen House and Nisbet's Tower next to it. The Tower, named after John Nisbet, the first owner of Gungreen House (and reputedly a smuggler) is believed to have been a carriage house and also appears on early maps as a doocot (dovecote).

Below the House's imposing buttressed wall, which retains the green, there is a pathway leading to the Smuggler's Passage, an entry to a system of tunnels and cellars under Gungreen and beyond, though these are now blocked. Steps from Smuggler's Passage lead to Gungreen which was a meeting place where the annual Herring Queen crowning ceremony took place before the new harbour extension was built.

Gungreen House itself is the most prominent building in Eyemouth, and was designed by James Adam in about 1755. The house has the reputation of being the one time home and haunt of smugglers and the house might almost have been designed with this in mind.

For those interested in longer walks, it is possible to continue on past the Fishmarket along The Coastal Path south to Berwick. Otherwise return to the opposite side of the harbour and Harbour Road.

Turn back up Manse Road to the Auld Kirk - you have reached the end of the Eyemouth Town Trail.

We hope that you have enjoyed your walk around Eyemouth and this brief insight into its architecture and heritage.

Further walks to help you explore this area of the Borders can be found in a booklet entitled "Walks around East Berwickshire" which is available along with other publications on the area from the Museum Shop.

There are many buildings associated with the fishing industry here, including that of the Fisherman's Mutual Association, a co-operative of local fishermen that assists with the catching and marketing of fish, which was founded in 1946. There are also beating sheds (used for repairing nets) and lobster ponds. Number 34 is an early 19th century pantiled building, an example of a traditionally detailed harbour-side building.



Fishing boat in the harbour



