

explore start bay

On the defensive

The number of pillboxes and gun emplacements surviving here bear witness to the role played by Torcross in defending the coast from enemy invasion in World War Two.



Defending the beaches



Following the outbreak of the Second World War there was a real fear of invasion. Torcross, like many beaches, was defended with minefields, barbed wire, anti-tank blocks and gun emplacements.

Torcross was particularly heavily defended because the beach was suitable for landing armoured vehicles and because any invaders would have to pass between this headland and the lake of Slapton Ley. As a result, at least six pill-boxes were constructed here, and all operated collectively. Most still survive today: (The location of 1, 2 and 3 are marked on the image above):

1. Behind you in the private garden, 10m away, is a

concrete mortar bunker in good condition used for firing 6 pounder anti tank shells.

2. In front of you, in the process of collapsing down the cliff, is an observation post leading to a pillbox.



3. Beside the coast path 20m to your left down the steps, is a machine gun emplacement in good condition. Bullet impact marks (from US training exercises for D-Day), are still visible on the outside wall.



4. 35m to your right, on the other side of this small headland, is another machine gun post, guarding Cove beach. Access to the beach is possible via a public footpath. The Slapton Ley water outlet emerges under this building.

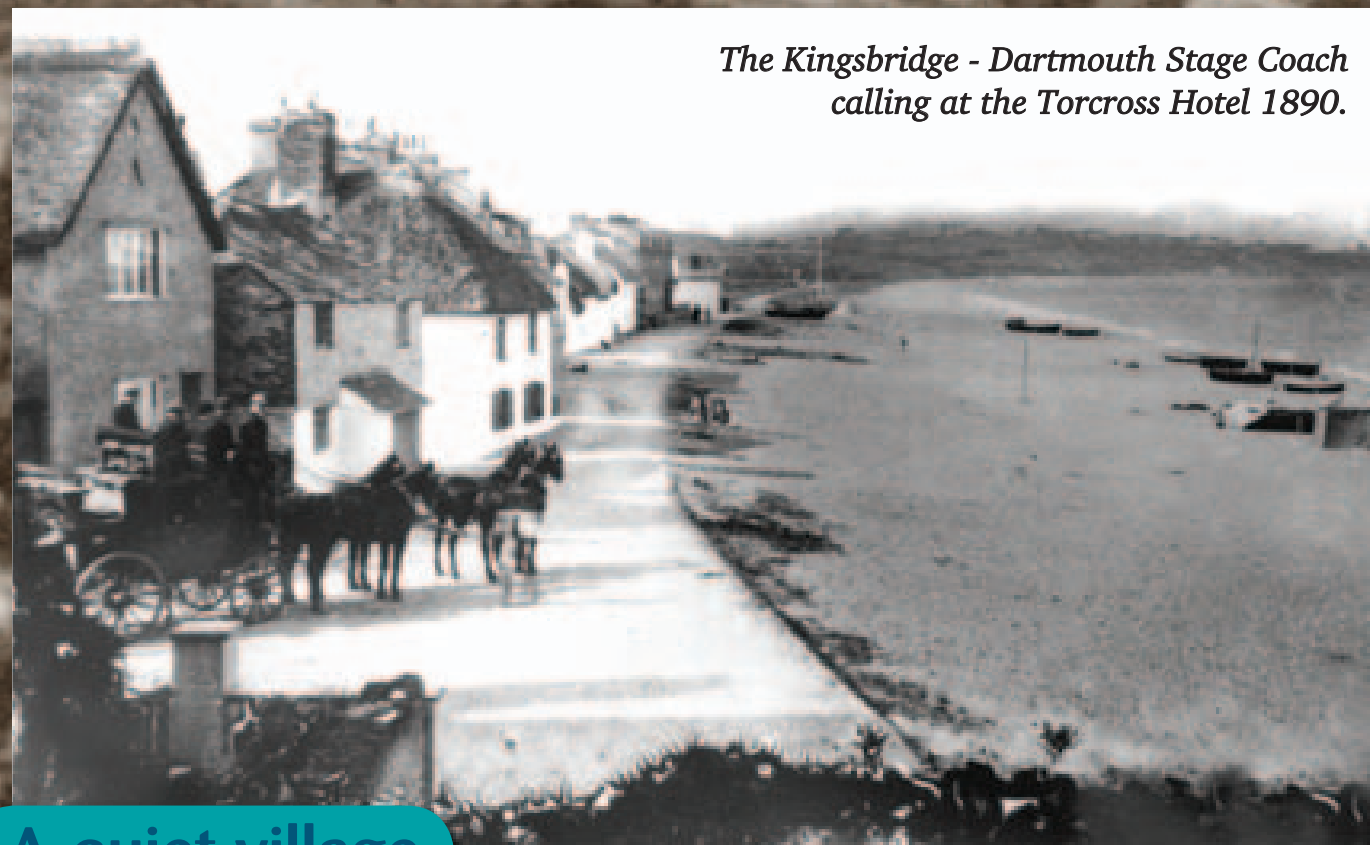
5. 120m inland up the hill was an observation pillbox, now incorporated into a private house.

6. Some 400m south is a much bigger gun emplacement, for firing at ships out at sea. This is now hidden in undergrowth on the cliff top.



The "covered way" over the coast path just to your left may have been built to give protection to troops from the firing of anti tank mortars just above.

All of these structures are on private land and access inside is not permitted nor safe.



The Kingsbridge - Dartmouth Stage Coach calling at the Torcross Hotel 1890.

A quiet village

Torcross was for many centuries a quiet, small, remote fishing village. The height of the pilchard fishing industry was in the 18th and early 19th Centuries, before over-fishing depleted the stocks. The building of the new turnpike (toll) road – now the A379 – in 1854 brought passing trade on the link between Dartmouth and Kingsbridge, and a new role as a tourist destination. The stories of Torcross are told at various points around the village. Full details can be found on the information board in the car park.



A coast on the move

Although the cliffs are made of hard slate, there are frequent small cliff falls. Severe storms have caused damage to Torcross for centuries. The most recent was in 1979, before the sea wall was built. Many of Britain's Second World War pillboxes have already been lost to the sea; more will follow.

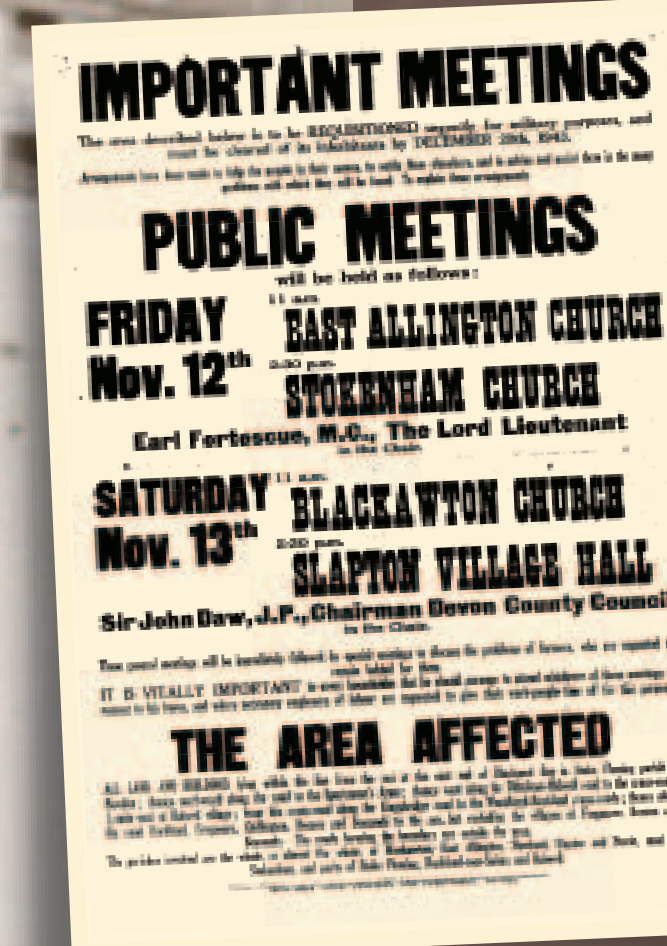


The mortar bunker before and after conservation works

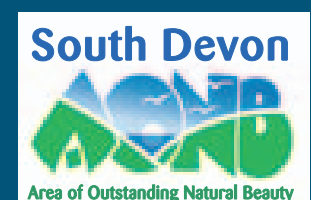
Conservation

These World War Two structures were built in a hurry at a time of national emergency; none were built to last. Some are in remarkably good condition, but decades of water penetration, rusting metal reinforcing bars and crumbling concrete are taking their toll. A conservation project in 2013 undertook some repair work to two of the structures: more will be needed in the years to come.

D-Day practice landings



In 1943 the entire civilian population of 3,000 was evacuated from this area so that Slapton Sands could be used for secret military exercises. 15,000 mostly U.S. troops, undertook full-scale battle exercises and practice beach landings in preparation for the D-day invasion of Normandy the following year. Over 1,000 men died in an attack by German torpedoed boats on the U.S. troop carrying ships and during the exercises. There is more information about the war time story of Torcross in the Start Bay Inn.



This panel has been produced by South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty www.southdevonaonb.org.uk



This panel is part of a series along the South West Coast Path in South Devon. The 630 mile Coast Path is the country's longest National Trail and is a great way to explore the South Devon AONB. www.southwestcoastpath.com



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