

The Wartime

Story Key points



Anticipating War

The Military Exercise on Slapton Beach July 1938

The link between Slapton Sands and D-Day began before the war. Whilst the government was denying that war was imminent in early 1938, a certain far-sighted Brigadier Bernard Law Montgomery ('Monty') was pressing for a combined forces amphibious landing exercise to be held in the summer of that year, the first of its kind since 1915.

Start Bay prepares for War

Beaches were covered with barbed wire to hamper invading forces and there was strategic placing of mines. Start Point lighthouse was camouflaged and over at the newly built BBC transmitter experiments were conducted to see if the transmission direction could be reversed to point out over the channel towards France.

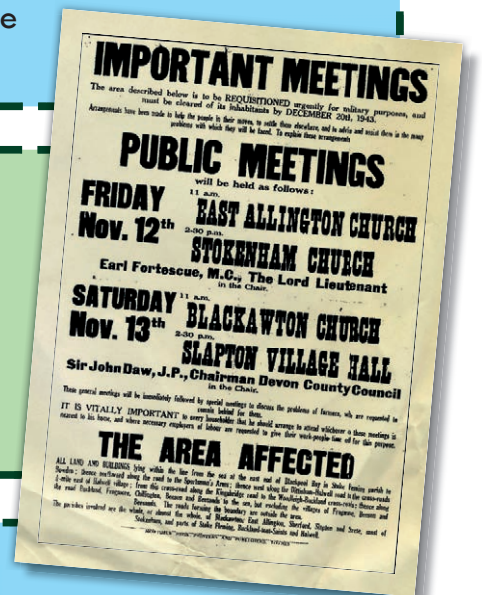


War Reaches Start Bay

Enemy fighters and bombers were overflying to Plymouth and its strategic dockyards. The coastal villages were relatively unscathed, with only occasional raids hitting home. Harwoods shop in Torcross was bombed where luckily there were no casualties. Beesands was less fortunate when a bomb hit the house next to the Cricket Inn killing seven people.

The Evacuation

On November 4th 1943 the chairman of Devon County Council, Sir John Daw, received a call from the War Cabinet that the parishes behind Slapton beach were to be evacuated by 20th December. To be cleared was a total of 30,000 acres – parts of six parishes, 3,000 people, 180 farms comprising 750 families in all.



The Americans Arrive

The evacuation of the land around Slapton Sands was needed in order to conduct rehearsals on a massive scale for the long-anticipated landings into occupied Europe, D-Day. The planning involved two armies with different leadership, techniques, uniforms and kit, even with different calibre of munitions. The respective armies were assigned to different practice beaches. Slapton was codenamed Utah beach and was assigned to the Americans.



The Return

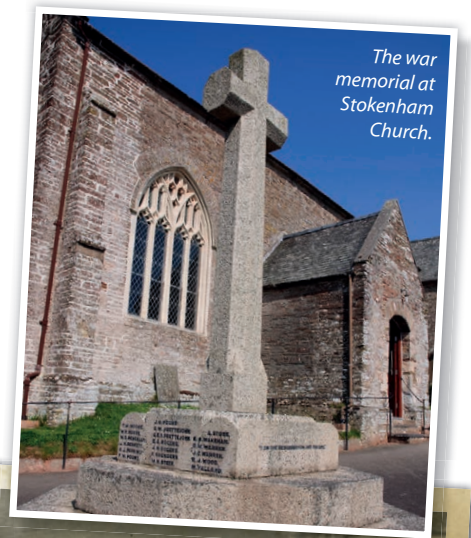
Once the area had been formally handed back to the Government, a bomb disposal unit was sent in with mine detectors to seek out unexploded ammunition. One aim was to get farmers back in time to do some autumn sowing. Remarkably there were no subsequent reports of lives lost from ordnance going off, though a number of explosions were triggered by ploughing or sheep.



Read more detail about the chapters in the Wartime Start Bay story in the booklets available here

Discover more about the Wartime Story

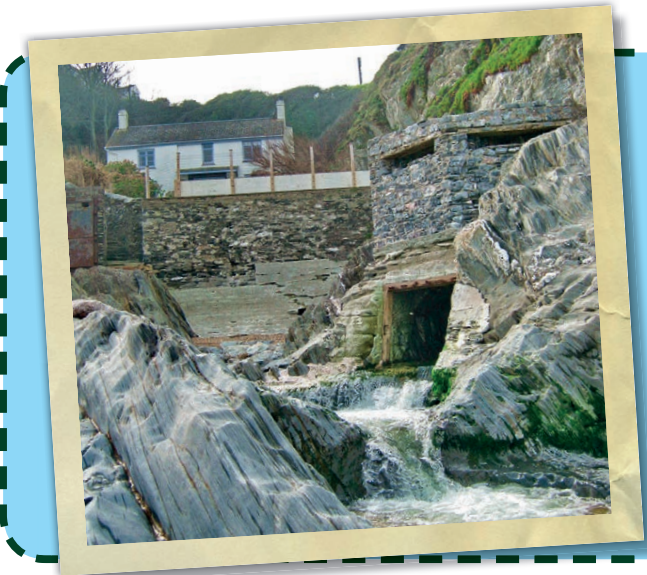
Go and see for yourself!



The war memorial at Stokenham Church.



The last days of the Royal Sands Hotel



Pillboxes

Hunt for the 3 nearby pillboxes:

- In the cliff to the left of the Torcross Hotel apartments (2 mins)
- On the beach down below 'Limpet Rocks' (5 mins)
- To the right of the coast path going down to Beesands beach (25 mins)

Pill box just south of Limpet rocks above Slapton Ley outlet.

Torcross Tank memorial

Go and read the panels which tell the story of the tank which was recovered from the water off Torcross in 1984 by Ken Small. It has become a focus for remembrance of those who lost their lives in preparing for the D-Day invasion.

The Sherman Tank being cleaned shortly after recovery.



War Damage

Find the evidence of damage caused by the D-day practice:

- The Royal Sands Hotel, already disused, was destroyed - now the site of the middle car park.
- Stokenham church was badly damaged - the south wall has plain glass instead of stained glass



Wartime Bridge Crossings

See if you can identify the points where temporary wartime bridges were erected over the Leys. One is on the 'Higher Ley' and the other on the 'Lower Ley'.

Local Museums

Visit Cookworthy Museum, Kingsbridge which has an electronic archive of wartime pictures and Dartmouth Museum which includes a video loop of the wartime story.

- The Strete Gate orienteering trail is the site of the Strete Manor Hotel
- The car park for the Kings Arms pub in Strete is the site of the blacksmiths



D-Day Memorial

Read the tributes to the people who left their homes to make way for the D-Day practice:

- The obelisk near the middle car park was presented by the United States in June 1954
- The memorial next to parking bays along the road in Torcross was put up by Stokenham Parish Council and is a replica of one set up in an international 60 acre site at Caen in Normandy.



Video

To see a video of the Evacuation story, see: www.explorestartbay.org

explore start bay

The Wartime Story is one of the many stories about Start Bay – more information can be found on interpretation panels including at Strete Gate, the Middle Car Park, Torcross Car Park, Hallsands and Start Point.

For more information see www.explorestartbay.org

