

Proposed Dorset and East Devon National Park

Evidence and Sources used to support the Proposal

Theme: Industrial, Railway and Military Heritage

A. Industrial Heritage: Dorset and East Devon

Although historically the area had been primarily agricultural, tourism is now the predominant industry. However, Dorset and East Devon also have a wealth of Industrial Heritage.

The area's early industrial history is mentioned in the Evidence Note on Cultural Heritage. East Dorset's production of pottery from local clays, and its workshops manufacturing jewellery and decorative items from Kimmeridge shale, served international markets in prehistoric and Roman times.

The region is perhaps best known for its high quality building stone and ball clay; the former quarried on the Isle of Purbeck and on Portland. Portland stone was chosen for the re-building of London's finest buildings after the 1666 Great Fire. Its quarries, no longer working, are now visitor attractions. Very small quarries, undertaking fine stone-masonry, were a feature of Purbeck in Roman and medieval times, and in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Small-scale businesses, whose family names go back generations in the Purbeck stone industry, still operate today. Different qualities make stone suited to many applications. In medieval times, Purbeck "Marble" was used decoratively in churches and cathedrals across the country. Purbeck stone was transported by sea from Swanage, horses and carts being driven into the water to offload stone into small vessels. In 1898 Swanage Pier was built, with a horse drawn narrow gauge tramway running through the streets and on to the pier, where the stone could be loaded directly into waiting boats. An extension to one of the sidings of the standard gauge Swanage Railway was also built to serve a stone store in the same vicinity. The tramway was in use until the 1930s, latterly used for transporting fish from the pier to a store built alongside the line around 1855. About 100 metres of the track still exist, embedded in the surface of the footway linking the pier to the town.

Purbeck ball clay was formed some 45 million years ago when kaolinite (decomposed granite) was washed by streams from Dartmoor and deposited in seams, mainly in the Norden area. It has been used for thousands of years, production increasing in the mid-1700s for Josiah Wedgwood's fine china ware. Ball clay is still used in the making of fine ceramics. It was initially transported by packhorse to wharves on the River Frome or Poole Harbour, but in 1806 the first narrow gauge railway was constructed from Corfe Castle to a wharf in Poole Harbour. This was followed by a network of short, narrow gauge railways in the ball clay locality. With the coming of the standard gauge branch from the main line near Wareham in 1885, a dedicated transshipment depot was constructed near Norden, known as Eldon's siding [Lord Eldon, a former Lord Chancellor of England, built the handsome Encombe House in the area of Purbeck's medieval royal hunting forest of King John, the Eldon family continuing to own the Encombe estate for around 200 years.] The Purbeck Mineral and Mining Museum celebrates the history of the extraction and transport of ball clay.

Another Dorset industry, going back over a thousand years, is that of rope making. The Bridport area provided perfect conditions for the growing of flax and hemp, the essential raw materials required. Records go back to the 12th century when King John ordered large quantities for his Navy. Rope and sailcloth production accounted for more than half of Bridport's population. Rope is still manufactured in Bridport to this day.

Also in Bridport, Palmers Brewery has been producing beer since 1794 and still uses traditional brewing methods. It was built by the Gundry Family who also ran the Rope Factory at that time, and retains its water wheel and thatched roof.

One of the lesser known claims to fame of the area is the important research that took place around Worth Matravers between 1940 and 1942. Starting with about 200 people in 1940, by 1942 over 2,000 scientific and technical personnel were involved with experimentation to perfect the development of radar to detect approaching enemy aircraft and U boats. Worth was particularly chosen for its flat cliff top site. The scientists hastily moved inland to Malvern in May 1942, but the RAF continued to operate a radar station at Worth until well after the War, the last 110 metre tower being dismantled in the early 1970s. Though little evidence remains of the installations, a memorial and interpretation panel have been placed at St Aldhelm's Head and exhibitions on Purbeck's radar history feature in local museums.

Axminster has been well known for the manufacture of carpets since 1755, when Thomas Whitty first started manufacturing rugs and carpets in the town. King George III and Queen Charlotte visited the factory in its early days to purchase carpets. The name 'Axminster' has been used world-wide ever since, referring to a specific type of weave. Although looms are still producing carpets at Axminster to this day, the work force was regrettably reduced by 75% in early 2013 due to the economy and the rising cost of raw materials.

Honiton has been famous for the production of lace since the Elizabethan era, when Flemish immigrants introduced the craft. In the seventeenth century thousands of people produced lace by hand in their homes. Queen Victoria had her wedding dress made from Honiton lace. The 13th century Allhallows Chapel now houses the Allhallows Museum of Lace and Local Antiquities.

Lyme Regis boasts a fully working restored water mill used for producing flour and dating back to 1340. It was restored by volunteers over a ten year period and is a popular tourist attraction.

Hidden away in the little village of Uffculme in Devon is a unique survivor of an industry of importance during the 17th and 18th centuries. There had been a mill of some description on the site since Saxon times and Coldharbour Woollen Mill retained a water wheel powered by the River Culme until 1978. Steam engines were also installed during the 19th century. It is now a working museum with steam engine and restored water wheel.

B. Railway Heritage

Swanage Heritage Railway, Purbeck, East Dorset – Linking the National Rail Network and Swanage

In 1840 the London and Southampton Railway opened, introducing a service from London to a terminus in Southampton, also serving the docks. This was later to be known as the London and South Western Railway. Several years passed before another company, the Southampton and Dorchester Railway, constructed a line into Dorset in 1847. This line was laid via Brockenhurst, Ringwood, Wimborne and Wareham to Dorchester South, and was referred to as 'Castleman's Corkscrew', named after Charles Castleman, a Wimborne solicitor who promoted the new railway, and the circuitous route it followed.

There was no direct railway line from Southampton into Bournemouth or Poole at that time, a branch being built from the Southampton and Dorchester Railway at Broadstone to serve Hamworthy Docks and a terminus at Bournemouth West. A few years later in 1862 the Ringwood, Christchurch and Bournemouth Railway constructed a branch from Ringwood to Christchurch; this was extended to Bournemouth East in 1870. Eventually track was laid between Christchurch and Brockenhurst and in 1886 the two Bournemouth stations were linked to create the route we know today. The various railway Companies were amalgamated into the London and South Western Railway which was to exist until it became the Southern Railway when grouping took place in 1923. Weymouth was served by the Great

Western Railway, where their branch from Yeovil connected with the Southampton and Dorchester Railway at Dorchester Junction.

In the meantime, plans were being formulated for a branch from Wareham to serve Corfe Castle and Swanage. Several proposals had been made to construct the branch from as early as 1847 but it was 1881 when the Swanage Railway Act was authorised by Parliament. Construction commenced in 1883 and the line was formally opened in May 1885 subsequently being purchased by the L&SWR in 1886. For many years frequent shuttle passenger services ran between Wareham and Swanage, with seasonal through trains during the holiday season. There were also regular freight services including the transportation of Purbeck ball clay, offloaded from the many narrow gauge railways which had crisscrossed Purbeck, some built as early as 1806. A dedicated interchange for the ball clay, known as Eldon's Siding, had been constructed near Norden to transfer the clay from narrow gauge to main line wagons. The Swanage branch survived the cuts proposed in the Beeching Report of 1963, but in 1965 freight services were withdrawn and in 1967 a closure notice was issued by British Railways. A local campaign to save the Branch was set up, but on January 1st 1972, despite intense local opposition, the last passenger train ran between Swanage and Wareham. During the summer of 1972 British Railways lifted all seven miles of track in just seven weeks, leaving a stub in place from Worgret Junction to Furzebrook to serve the ball clay siding. British Petroleum would later build a rail depot at Furzebrook to load rail tankers with liquid petroleum gas pumped from their installation at Wytch Farm.

The next few years saw much negotiation by preservation groups to reinstate the line to Wareham. Dorset County Council purchased part of the track bed from British Railways in 1974; this was the section between Swanage and Motala (the location of British Railway's buffer stops at the end of the surviving stub). Swanage Urban District Council purchased the track bed at Swanage station and the surrounding area. A referendum of Swanage residents in 1975 resulted in a massive 83% voting for the Railway to be rebuilt. In 1976 volunteers gained access to Swanage station and in 1977 substantial track laying took place. Starting with a few hundred yards of track in 1979, the line was gradually re-laid, reaching the one mile point at Herston in 1983 and the three mile point at Harmans Cross in 1988. Extending the line to Corfe Castle took a further three years, but a Park and Ride had to be introduced at Norden before passenger trains could be run all the way in 1995.

Attention was then focussed on extending the line further and in 2002 track laying reached British Railway's buffer stops at Motala. Shortly after that a brand new Virgin Voyager train was the first to traverse the line from Wareham to Swanage for thirty years, being formally named 'Dorset Voyager' at a special ceremony at Swanage station. In 2005 the gas trains from Furzebrook were withdrawn; road tankers replacing them to convey the depleting amount of gas produced as a by-product. However, traffic did not cease as the Swanage branch has since been used by a number of passenger charter trains. The first passenger train from London for 37 years arrived in Swanage on an historic day in April 2009 attracting large numbers of onlookers.

The Purbeck Community Rail Partnership was set up some years ago to facilitate the re-instatement of passenger trains between Wareham and Swanage. Network Rail is currently re-signalling the main line through Wareham to include modern signalling on and off the Swanage branch at Worgret Junction, the latter funded by Dorset County Council. A recent grant from the Coastal Communities Fund will enable track and rolling stock to be upgraded to enable a regular service to be re-instated between Swanage and Wareham or beyond in the near future. The Swanage Railway Trust is also currently negotiating for the use of the redundant sidings at Furzebrook for much needed space.

Today, Swanage Railway is one of the top tourist attractions in the area and one of the busiest Heritage Railways in the UK carrying over 200,000 passengers annually.

The completion of the planned linkage of the heritage railway to the main line provides an opportunity, with appropriate supporting infrastructure, for a step change in sustainable transport, tourism and energy usage of local, regional and national significance.

Seaton Tramway, East Devon

From 1969 to 1971, the former British Railways redundant branch-line from Seaton Junction to Colyton was converted to a narrow gauge electric tramway with the specific intention of conserving the heritage of the UK's trams. A total of fourteen trams of different styles and periods operate on the line. An original, 1906 tram from the Exeter Corporation Tramways system survives there, along with a 1904 Metropolitan Tramways car, and half-scale replicas from various cities.

C. Military History

The military history of Dorset and East Devon spans millennia. The area's many prehistoric hill forts include the massive fortification of Maiden Castle near Dorchester.

Roman roads crossed Dorset, linking Roman administrative centres and garrison towns such as Dorchester and Blandford Forum with other Roman settlements in south and south-west England.

Wareham has Britain's most complete surviving Saxon town walls. Constructed between the Frome and Piddle rivers at the point where these are closest to each other, Wareham was a site and port of strategic and commercial significance in the medieval period.

Corfe Castle is one of the most spectacular Norman castle sites, though its history reflects occupation from early times to the English Civil War when the castle fell to Cromwell's troops.

Impressive Napoleonic fortifications, upgraded in WWII, are to be seen at Nothe Fort, Weymouth.

During World War I and II Dorset, located on the English Channel, was both a target and important to the Royal Navy. The large Portland Harbour, constructed in its present form at the end of the 19th century and protected by Nothe Fort and the Verne Citadel, was for many years, including during the wars, one of the largest Royal Navy bases. British, American and Canadian ships gathered in the harbour and nearby in Weymouth bay before the D-Day landings. Training for the landings also took place in Dorset, in particular at the long sandy beach at Studland.

Portland Harbour continued to be used as a Royal Navy and NATO training base until the 1990s. It is now a civilian port and recreation area which was used for the sailing events in the 2012 Olympic Games.

Dorset's beaches were on the frontline in WWII when a German invasion was expected to target Dorset's secluded beaches. Anti-tank defences are still visible on Chesil Beach. On Chesil's Fleet [home to many seabird species], Barnes Wallis's bouncing bombs were tested.

Purbeck became England's Silicon Valley when the pioneering development of radar technology, vital to Britain's war effort and the inspiration for technologies familiar today in every microwave oven and mobile phone, took place at Worth Matravers. The development and successful application of radar in the air and at sea enabled Britain, against the odds, to win the Battle of Britain and the Atlantic Convoy War.

At Dorset's Studland beaches, King George VI, Churchill and Eisenhower watched allied rehearsals for the D Day landings from a special bunker, which can be visited today.

In 1943, the MOD acquired its Lulworth Ranges, visited today for their spectacular coastal walks and biodiversity, and the evacuated "lost village" of Tyneham, its story interestingly interpreted by a MOD-supported Trust.

Sources include the following:

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Lyme Regis Museum: various publications
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Dorset AONB: Website and publications
East Devon AONB: Website and publications
Seaton Tramway: publications

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