

Tavistock HERITAGE TRAILS

TRAIL 2: Tavistock and the Dukes of Bedford

Devon's World Heritage Town...

This walk explores how the 6th and 7th Dukes of Bedford transformed Tavistock in the 19th century through an ambitious programme of civic architecture and urban planning.

These changes were financed by income from forestry, agricultural rents and increasingly by profits from metal mining which expanded rapidly during the industrial revolution. The most important mine was Devon Great Consols in

the Tamar Valley, which opened in 1844 and became the world's largest producer of copper and arsenic. In 2006 the global significance of West Devon's mining industries and the dukes' architectural legacy were recognised when Tavistock and the Tamar Valley were included in the UNESCO Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site.



The walk starts by the church tower in West Street and facing the junction with Market Street. You will find other walking instructions in italics like this message.

1. Historic Market Centre

This area was Tavistock's commercial heart from the Middle Ages until the Pannier Market opened in 1864. In Market Street there are late 16th and 17th century timber framed buildings, notably Taylor's restaurant, which jetties over the street, and Book Stop which has been described as the finest town house of the period in Devon. The Cornmarket (on the other side of the street and now occupied by the shop, FatFace) opened in

1836 and reflected the town's importance as an agricultural centre. It was designed by Charles Fowler, who the 6th Duke also commissioned to build Covent Garden.

If you want to discover more about this part of Tavistock and its commercial history since the Middle Ages, walk up Market Street to find the information board on the wall at the far side of Taylor's restaurant.



Enter Church Lane, walk past the church tower and then follow the path across the church yard from where you can see The Bedford Hotel and Plymouth Road.

2. The Bedford Hotel and Plymouth Road

The Bedford Hotel was converted from a private residence into the town's premier coaching inn by the 6th Duke. Between 1822 and 1830 the original house, which is the wing to the left of the entrance, was extended to include the porch, bedrooms and a ballroom. Visitors arrived along the recently completed Plymouth Road which

provided a grand entrance into the town. The hotel, and the fashionable middle class houses flanking the road, were designed by some of the country's leading architects including Sir Jeffry Wyatt (later Wyatville) and Edward Blore, both of whom also worked on Windsor Castle



Turn left out of the church yard, cross Plymouth Road using the zebra crossing and turn left. Follow the pavement round to the right as you reach the roundabout.

Tavistock HERITAGE TRAILS

TRAIL 2: Tavistock and the Dukes of Bedford

3. Bedford Estate Office

From this unassuming building the dukes' stewards wielded power and authority on their behalf. The dukes' main residence was at Woburn Abbey in Bedfordshire. On occasional visits to Tavistock they stayed at their hunting lodge at Endsleigh on the River Tamar and lavishly entertained guests including Queen Victoria. The stewards managed most day to day business

in Tavistock and the countryside estate which covered some 18 square miles between the Tavy and Tamar valleys. This included collecting residential and commercial rents, negotiating mine leases, supervising improvements to agricultural buildings and farming methods, managing building projects and safeguarding the dukes' political interests.



Continue to the Post Office, cross the road at the traffic lights and walk past the public toilets and war memorial to enter Guildhall Square.

4. Guildhall Square

On the site of the former monastery's great courtyard the dukes blended Victorian gothic public buildings with the medieval architecture of the abbey, intentionally displaying their status, wealth and paternalistic generosity to the town's inhabitants. The 6th Duke employed Plymouth architect John Foulston between 1824 and 1831 to restore the abbey ruins and build the subscription

library. In 1848 the 7th Duke's architect, Theophilus Jones, designed the Guildhall complex which included a courtroom, police cells and fire station. Now a World Heritage Site visitors' centre, the Guildhall was used as a court until the year 2000 and was occupied by the police until 2012.



Walk back past the public toilets and the war memorial and turn left. After crossing Market Rd and the bridge over the River Tavy, turn left and walk along Dolvin Road.

5. Dolvin Road

The 18 terraced workers' cottages were built by the Bedford estate between 1845 and 1848. Plans for six more were abandoned as the locally produced bricks, which were expensive because West Devon had little suitable clay, were needed to line the town's new sewers. The school was opened by the National Society in 1847 to provide

elementary education for working class children in accordance with Church of England doctrines. The Bedfords, who were staunch Whigs and Liberals, promoted religious freedom by also sponsoring a school for nonconformists' children and funding church and chapel building in Tavistock and neighbouring villages.



*For a shorter version of this walk turn left at the mini roundabout. Cross the bridge and continue to the main street. Opposite the Coop turn left and continue to **stop 9**. Beware of traffic in both directions on the bridge where there is no pavement.*



For the longer walk cross the junction at the mini roundabout and continue straight ahead along Mount Tavy Road, which includes more Bedford cottages, and Stannary Bridge Road which crosses the river. This short section follows a busy main road so keep on the pavement which is narrow in places. Turn left and walk along Parkwood Road.

6. Parkwood Road Cottages

These cottages were built to a cheaper standardised design with rubble stone and granite which the Bedford estate used instead of brick after 1846. Each had a back yard with outbuildings including a privy and pigsty. Between 1845 and 1866 some 300 cottages were built which accommodated nearly 1 in 5 people in

Tavistock parish. They were superior to town centre houses which became increasingly crowded and unsanitary as the local population trebled during the mining boom. However, the housing crisis was only resolved when mining declined from the 1860s and many people emigrated to work in the mines overseas.



Continue along Parkwood Road to the junction with Heritage Park (on your right).

7. Tavistock Iron Works

19th century Tavistock had three foundries which exported mining equipment across the world. The first, Tavistock Iron Works, was established in 1800 by shareholders including

the 6th Duke's steward. It produced ore crushers, beam engines, water wheels and the world's first wrought iron boat.



Continue along Parkwood Road past the terraced houses. At the entrance to Foundry Mews stop and look right.

The foundry closed in 1891 and reopened a few years later as a wool factory which operated until 1965. The red brick house with bell tower

was the wool factory office. The mansion on the hill behind it (now an apartment building) was built for foundry owner John Gill.



Continue along Parkwood Road to the Town Mill.

8. The Town Mill

The town corn mill (now Lawsons' shop) was built in 1846 with a miller's house which was on the site of the adjacent car park. It replaced the old mill which was rebuilt as part of the Guildhall development. Brook Street ahead of you is named after the Millbrook, a mile long medieval leat

which had supplied water power for the town's corn mill and other mills. Parkwood Road was built in 1817 to provide level access to the town centre from the turnpike road to Okehampton which had previously taken a steep route along the side of the Tavy valley.



*Go straight ahead up Brook Street and Duke Street until you reach an arch on your left which goes into the Pannier Market at **stop 9**.*

9. The Pannier Market and Duke Street

The 7th Duke's new market was the Bedfords' most ambitious building project. Streets were demolished and part of the River Tavy filled in to make space for Market Road, the Pannier Market, Butchers' Hall and double fronted shops opening onto a new Duke Street. The new facilities replaced the existing butter, meat, poultry and vegetable markets near the

church. They were also intended to stop unauthorised street stalls which, according to the 1859 Tavistock Markets Act, operated 'to the great inconvenience and danger of the inhabitants'. The market opened in 1862 with a supper for the 160 people employed during its construction.



If the Pannier Market gates are unlocked go through one of the archways that lead to the Pannier Market. Turn right, walk the length of the market and go through the archway in front of you which leads under the Town Hall to Bedford Square.



If the Pannier Market gates are locked continue to the end of Duke Street and take the first left into Bedford Square.

10. Town Hall

The Town Hall was added to the Pannier Market plans after a public campaign for what the Tavistock Gazette called 'a spacious and decent room for the social gatherings of the people'. It was designed by the 7th Duke's architect, Edward Rundle, and financed by a 'fine' on the shareholders when the mining lease for Devon

Great Consols was renewed. The New Hall, as it was known, was used in 1863 to celebrate the Prince of Wales' wedding. It opened officially the following year with three days of celebrations including an 'Exhibition of Rare and Valuable Works of Science and Art'.



Walk across the front of the Town Hall to the Duke of Bedford's Statue.

11. The Duke of Bedford's Statue

Francis Russell, 7th Duke of Bedford, died in 1861 before the Pannier Market and Town Hall were completed. His statue was made after his death in bronze using tin and copper from local mines donated by his son and placed on a granite pedestal paid for by public subscription. It originally stood outside the Guildhall and was moved to its current position in 2020.

Metal mining, which funded much of the 7th Duke's building programme, declined rapidly after the mid-1860s when global copper prices

collapsed, ore deposits became exhausted and cheap foreign competition increased. Late 19th century Tavistock was a post-industrial rural market town to which later dukes made few major changes. In 1911, after Lloyd George's Liberal budget raised taxes on the rich to pay for social reforms and expand the navy, the 11th Duke of Bedford effectively ended his family's long association with Tavistock when he sold most of his properties in the town.