

Tuesday, 13th September 2016, Portland Explored with David Buss

"An Island Visited"

The weather forecast for the day had been changing twice a day but looked OK on the Sunday evening when David gave the green light for the walk to go ahead. He wanted a reasonable day so we could appreciate the views on offer.

Three cars drove to Portland and met in the arranged car park. The nearer we got, the darker the sky became and as we arrived the heavens opened accompanied by thunder and lightening, the remnants of Tropical storm Hermine. Not a great start but by about 11.30, the weather had brightened considerably and 3 ladies and 8 men set off.

We first got some misty views towards the east and Portland harbour, one of the largest man made harbours in the world. It began construction in 1849, completed in 1872 and was build by local convicts.

We walked through the Governor's well kept Community gardens and the surrounding allotments and greenhouses now sadly neglected. We walked through the Weares, a Celtic word meaning rough and wild land. These were previously common land for sheep grazing before the quarrying and landslides. We took a winding fairly steep path down to Durdle pier. The old hand winch Derrick crane remains in place and rows of roughly shaped stone are lined up ready.

We climbed down to Church Ope Cove, the only beach on the eastern side of the island. Wooden beach huts skirt the border of the beach detracting from it's beauty. We saw the remains of Rufus Castle built on a rocky promontory overlooking the cove and probably built for King William 11 who was called Rufus due to his red hair. In the early quarrying days, stone was shipped out on sailing barges from 3 piers around Church Ope Cove. In various locations are the lifting gears and pulleys for the huge slabs of Portland stone, some still in situ.

Portland stone was used to build many of the historic buildings in London. Convicts worked the quarries at the Grove and provided 1500 tons of stone a day for the breakwater. The first convicts arrived on the island in 1848 and had to build their own cells. The Grove Convict establishment is now a Young Offender's unit.

As we approached the red and white striped Portland bill lighthouse, rain forced us to put our waterproofs back on. We then split up for an hour, some for a drink in the café and some for a meal in the pub. For 300 years, the lighthouse has guided vessels heading for Weymouth and Portland and acted as a way mark for vessels navigating the English Channel. A red sector light warns Mariners of the hazardous Shambles bank lying three miles offshore.

We had a look at the remains of Pulpit rock, previously an ancient rock stack which took a battering in a severe storm in early 2014. Pulpit rock is all that remains of a natural rock arch. Horse drawn tramways took stone to cranes for loading on to barges. The stack is made from blocks of waste Portland stone, discarded and leftover from different quarries and beds all formed under a sub-tropical sea around 145 million years ago.

After lunch, the weather had brightened up again and we walked along the western side of the island through an old quarry. Later, we walked through Tout quarry sculpture park and nature reserve. It's an abandoned stone quarry which has been turned into a stone sculpture park housing over 60 pieces, hand carved by local stone masons. Unfortunately, the rain returned with a vengeance and we didn't give as much attention to the sculptures as they warranted. We soon reached the end of the walk and the sun came out ready for the group photo.



Thank you David for organising the walk. I will certainly be tempted to return to the area.

Heather Fereday
26th September 2016