

## **Sustenance from the sea**

A self-guided walk around St Abbs in Berwickshire



Discover a picturesque village on the southeast coast of Scotland  
Find out about both dangers and opportunities offered by its coastal position  
Explore the old harbour and find out about the fishing industry  
See how locals have developed a new economy based on tourism

[www.discoveringbritain.org](http://www.discoveringbritain.org)

*the stories of our landscapes  
discovered through walks*







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Cover image: St Abbs harbour © Martin Haslett

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# Sustenance from the sea

## Explore the seaside village of St Abbs

St Abbs is just off the main road between London and Edinburgh but the calm and tranquillity of the village itself make it seem like a world away.

This sheltered harbour was once one of the most significant ports between the Tyne and the Forth. The settlement was founded on fishing and people gained their livelihoods from the sea for generations.



Although the sea gives, it also takes. Shipwrecks around this rocky coast caused the loss of lives but also prompted the establishment of a lifeboat station and a lighthouse.



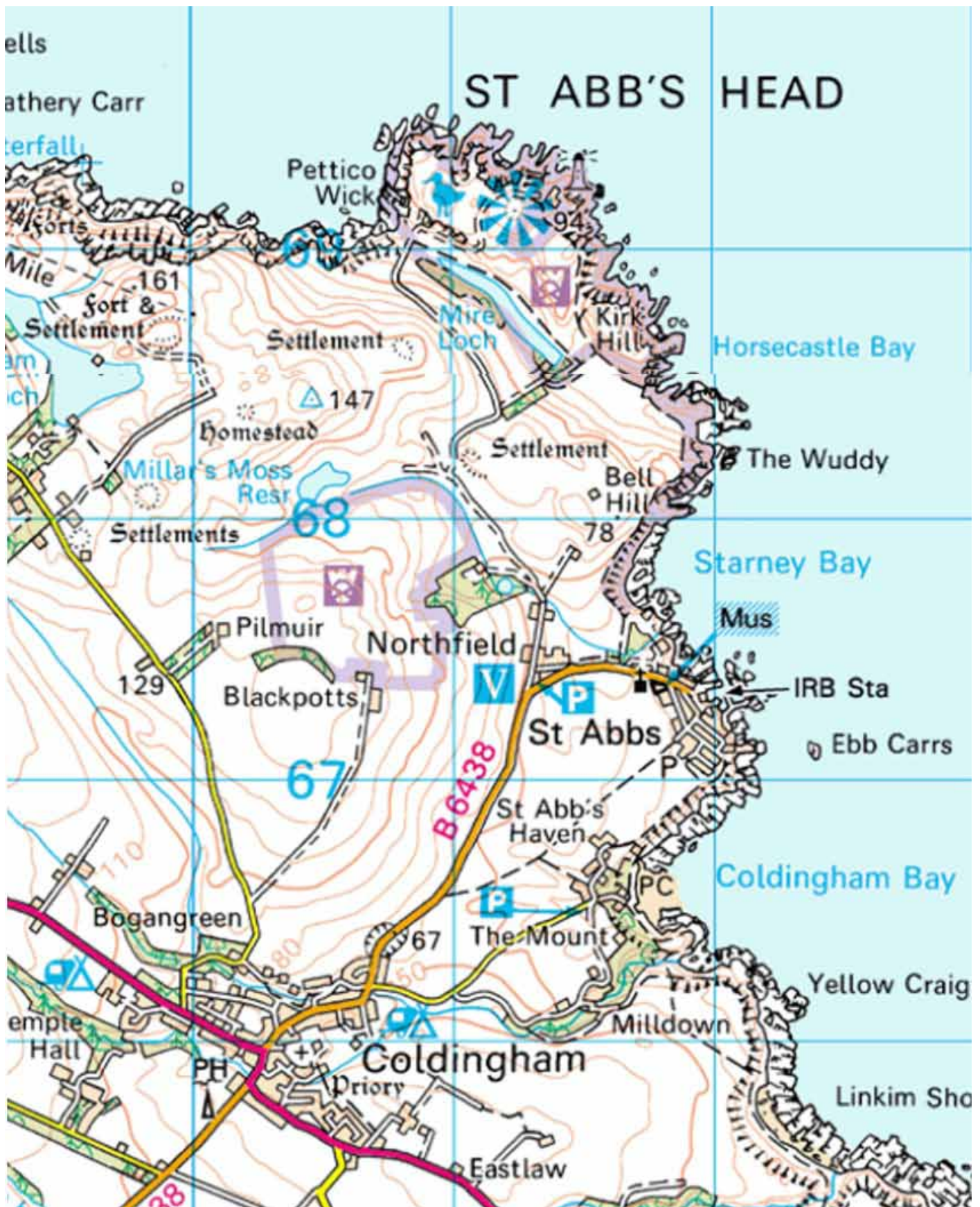
As fish stocks declined people needed to find new sources of income and they turned to tourism. See some of the stunning landscapes and seascapes that attract visitors.

Find out about initiatives driven by the local community to keep their village thriving. Reflect on both the advantages and disadvantages of relying on tourism.

This walk offers the opportunity to explore a picturesque village that has been shaped by the sea in so many ways.

St Abbs lifeboat station in the harbour (top); piles of lobster pots (bottom)  
© Martin Haslett

## Area map



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## Practical information

<b>Location</b>	St Abbs, near Eyemouth, Berwickshire, Scotland
<b>Start and finish</b>	St Abbs harbour
<b>Getting there</b>	<p><b>Car</b> - St Abbs is easily accessible from the A1(T) between Berwick-upon-Tweed and Dunbar. There is parking at the Harbour (charges apply) and in the village above (free).</p> <p><b>Train</b> - The nearest railway stations are Berwick-upon-Tweed (12 miles) and Dunbar (19 miles).</p> <p><b>Bus</b> - St Abbs is served by a local bus from Berwick-upon-Tweed every hour; alight at the Old School (Stop 12 on the walk). A long-distance service between Berwick-upon-Tweed and Edinburgh stops at nearby Coldingham but does not go into St Abbs village.</p> <p><b>Bicycle</b> - National Cycle Route 76 (Berwick-upon-Tweed to St Andrews) runs through Eyemouth just 4 miles away.</p>
<b>Walk distance</b>	1 ½ miles
<b>Level</b>	<b>Moderate</b> – there are some steep sections up from and down to the harbour including some steps.
<b>Terrain</b>	Pavements, harbour walls, lanes
<b>Conditions</b>	The outer harbour may be dangerous in stormy weather.
<b>Suitable for</b>	<p><b>Families</b> – Plenty for children to enjoy (see below).</p> <p><b>Wheelchairs and pushchairs</b> - Steps and steep parts of route can be avoided by taking alternative routes. Parking at higher and lower levels is available so that those with limited mobility can do the walk in two parts.</p>
<b>Family-friendly activities</b>	<p><b>St Abbs Visitor Centre</b> includes activities for children and a high-powered telescope to view the cliffs and wildlife.</p> <p><b>St Abbs and Eyemouth Voluntary Marine Reserve</b> has a Rockpool Explorer's Guide suitable for children: <a href="http://www.marine-reserve.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/StAbbs_Rookpoolguide_web.pdf">http://www.marine-reserve.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/StAbbs_Rookpoolguide_web.pdf</a></p> <p>The <b>putting green</b> (Stop 11) is open from June to August during the daytime and evenings; putters and balls are available from St Abbs Post Office and Shop (Stop 10).</p> <p><b>Old Smiddy Coffee Shop</b> at Northfield Farm (Stop 14) has a children's play area outside.</p>

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### Refreshments

**Old School Café** at The Ebba Centre (Stop 12) offers fresh home baking and light lunches. It is open daily and has both indoor and outdoor seating.

**Old Smiddy Coffee Shop** at Northfield Farm (Stop 14) offers home-made baking and light lunches including freshly-made St Abbs crab sandwiches. It is open daily from January to October and on weekends only in November and December.

**Ebb Carrs Café** in The Harbour (start and end of walk, Stop 16) serves light refreshments and full meals with local seafood a speciality.

There is a **picnic table** overlooking the old harbour at the start and end of the walk.

The **village shop** (Stop 10) sells chilled drinks, snacks and ice creams.

### Toilets

There are public toilets in the harbour car park at the start and end of the walk.

### Useful information

**St Abbs Lifeboat Station** in the old harbour (Stop 4) is occasionally open to the public.

[rnli.org/findmynearest/station/Pages/St-Abbs-Lifeboat-Station.aspx](http://rnli.org/findmynearest/station/Pages/St-Abbs-Lifeboat-Station.aspx)

**St Abbs Market** takes place at the Ebba Centre (Stop 12) every Friday. Stalls include local fresh produce, crafts and great gift ideas.

Fridays from April to October 10am to 4pm; Fridays from November and December 10am to 3pm.

[www.st-abbs-market.com](http://www.st-abbs-market.com)

**St Abbs Visitor Centre** on Coldingham Road (Stop 14) has permanent and changing exhibitions about the local area including history of the village, geology and wildlife; family-friendly.

Open April to October 7 days a week (10am to 5pm) and November Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays (11am to 4pm); at all other times by appointment only.

Admission is free but donations are gratefully received.

[www.stabbsvisitorcentre.co.uk](http://www.stabbsvisitorcentre.co.uk)

### Tourist information

**St Abbs Visitor Centre** (see above for opening times)

Email: [hello@stabbsvisitorcentre.co.uk](mailto:hello@stabbsvisitorcentre.co.uk)

Telephone: 01890 771 672

Eyemouth Tourist Information Centre

Auld Kirk, Manse Road, Eyemouth TD14 5JE

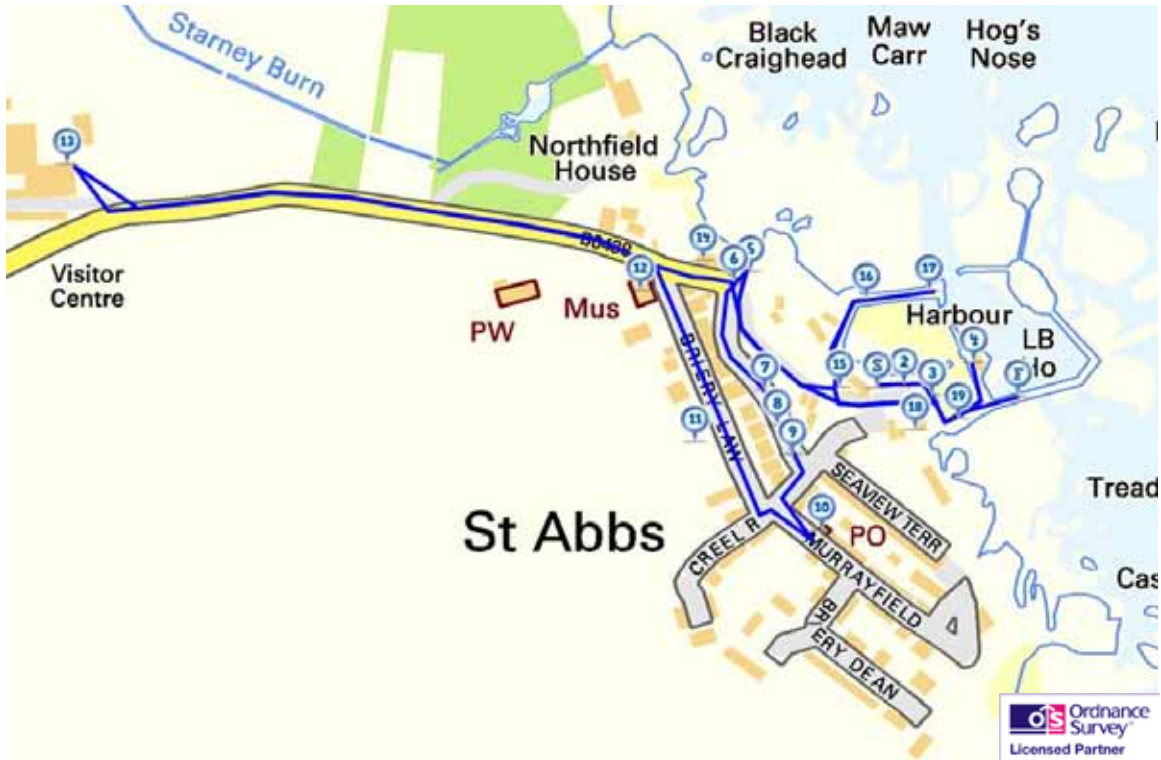
[www.visiteyemouth.com](http://www.visiteyemouth.com)

**Visit Scotland - Scottish Borders**

[www.visitscotland.com/destinations-maps/scottish-borders](http://www.visitscotland.com/destinations-maps/scottish-borders)

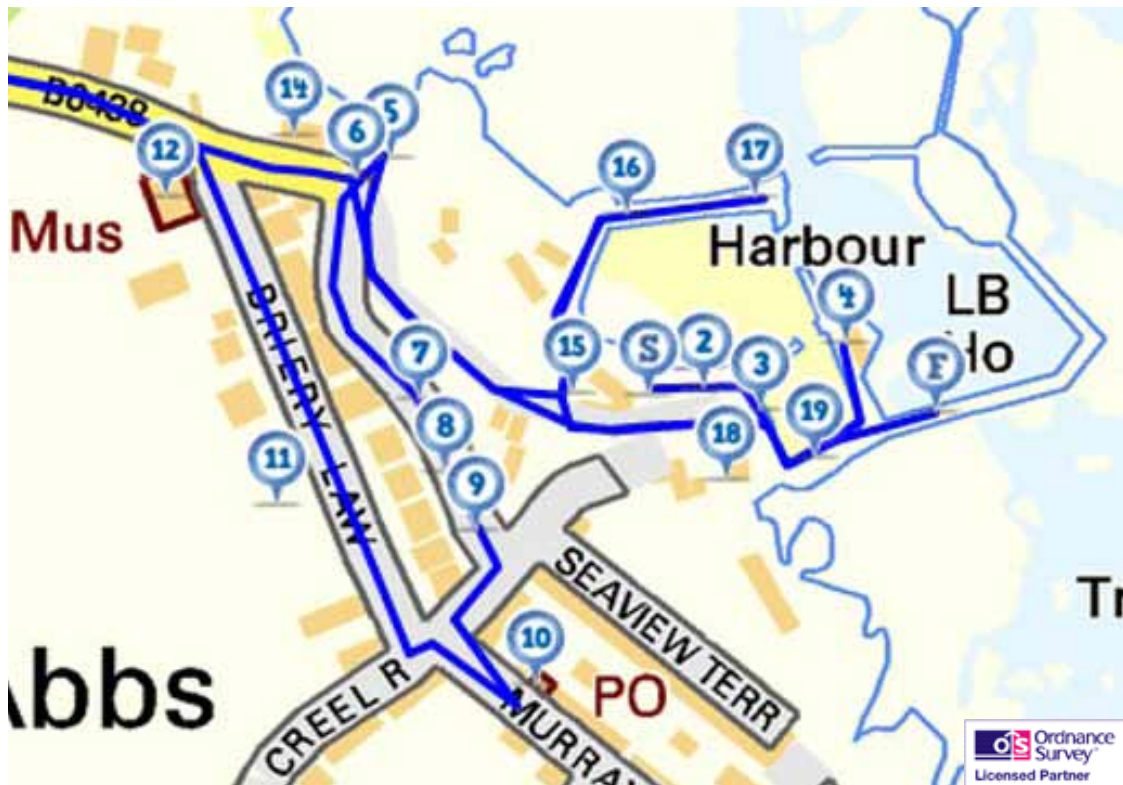
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## Route overview



Note: The Visitor Centre has moved; it is no longer at Northfield Farm as shown on the map but rather at Stop 14

## Detail of harbour area and village





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## Stopping points

- Start** Picnic area overlooking harbour (behind Ebb Carrs Café)
2. Picnic area overlooking harbour (behind Ebb Carrs Café)
  3. Old harbour
  4. Lifeboat station
  5. East Coast Fishing Disaster Memorial
  6. East Coast Fishing Disaster Memorial
  7. Parking area overlooking harbour
  8. Parking area overlooking harbour
  9. Near telephone box
  10. St Abbs Post Office and shop, 1 Murrayfield
  11. Putting green, Briery Law
  12. Ebba Centre and Old School Café, corner of Briery Law and Coldingham Road
  13. Northfield Farm
  14. St Abbs Visitor Centre, Coldingham Road
  15. Ebb Carrs Café, The Harbour
  16. Harbour wall looking towards St Abbs Head
  17. Harbour wall looking out to sea
  18. St Abbs Marine Station, The Harbour
  19. Old harbour
- Finish** Old harbour

## Other places to visit

### St Abb's Head National Nature Reserve

200 acres of wild coastline including sheer cliffs which are world-renowned for birdwatching; seabird cruises departing from Eyemouth in summer months; see website for walking trail and rockpooler's guide

Open all year round; access to the north of the village; car park by Northfield Farm

Car park free for National Trust for Scotland Members; £2 non-members

[www.nts.org.uk/Property/St-Abbs-Head-National-Nature-Reserve](http://www.nts.org.uk/Property/St-Abbs-Head-National-Nature-Reserve)

### Eyemouth Museum

Documents the fishing and social heritage of Eyemouth, brought to life in its exhibits including the famous Eyemouth Tapestry that commemorates the Great East Coast Fishing Disaster

Located in the Auld Kirk, Manse Road, Eyemouth TD14 5JE

Opening: April to October, Monday to Saturday 10am to 4pm and Sunday 12 noon to 4pm

Admission: £3.50 adults, £3 concessions, under-16s free

[www.eyemouthmuseum.org](http://www.eyemouthmuseum.org)

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## 1. Welcome to St Abbs

### Picnic area behind café overlooking the harbour

St Abbs stands on the shoulder of the southeast coast of Scotland. The prominent rocky outcrop of St Abb's Head has long been a navigation point for seamen and St Abbs was once one of the most important harbours between the River Tyne to the south and the Firth of Forth to the north.

The coastal position is central to understanding St Abbs. This walk will trace the development of St Abbs which thrived for centuries as a fishing community until the decline of that industry during the twentieth century.

We will discover how St Abbs adapted to the changing circumstances and looked for different ways to sustain the local economy. In particular we will find out how tourism has brought both advantages and disadvantages to the local community.



St Abbs, perched on the rocky coast  
Nachosan, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)



St Abb's Head  
Bob Jones, Geograph (CCL)

This walk was created by Martin Haslett.

**Martin:** "For many years I have been searching out beautiful parts of Scotland on my travels. I first came to St Abbs a few years ago and I was impressed by its spectacular location."

"As well as the village, St Abbs's Head and other parts of the Berwickshire coast are lovely areas to walk and explore."

"This is a landscape shaped by the sea – the coastal features, the human settlements and the local economy have all been influenced by water, waves and wind."

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#### Directions 1

Remain in the same place.

## 2. Men of the sea

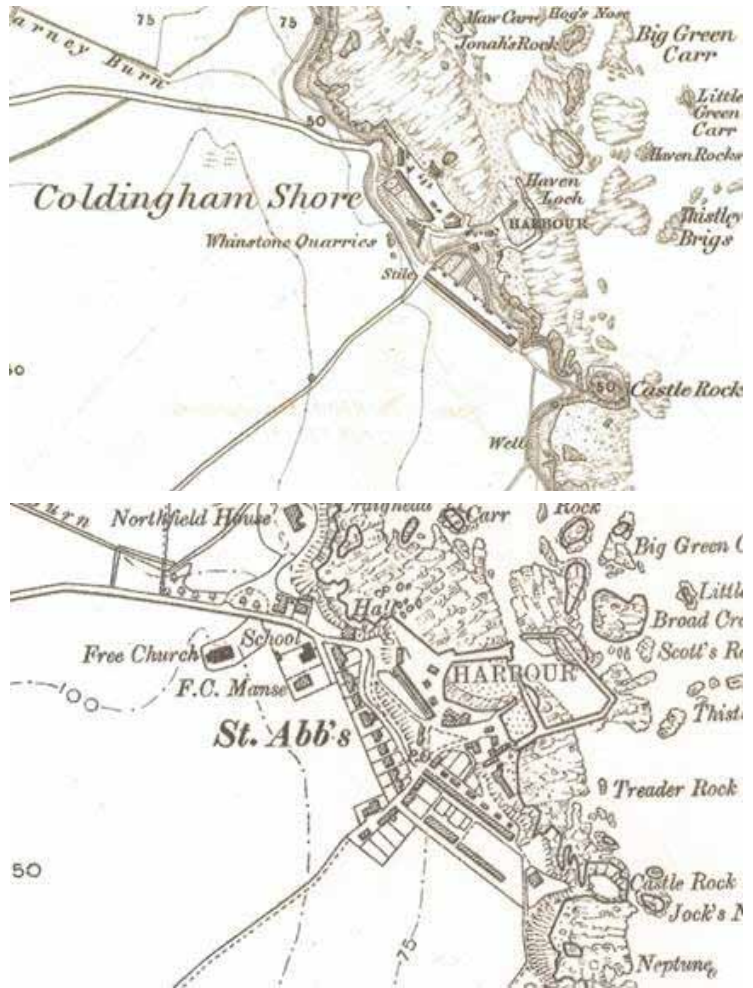
### Picnic area behind café overlooking the harbour

For centuries the county of Berwickshire in the Scottish Borders has been shaped by agriculture inland and fishing by the coast.

Many towns and villages have ancient origins linked to these occupations. But St Abbs is comparatively new. In fact there was no settlement here at all until a few centuries ago.

The nearby village of Coldingham is a long-established fishing community. Fishermen from Coldingham used to carry their nets and gear to the shore here - a walk of over a mile. This must have added to their hard lives, especially after a tough day at sea. So from the middle of the eighteenth century fishermen started to build cottages here.

This settlement became known as Coldingham Shore and by the 1830s 16 families were permanently resident. At the end of the nineteenth century the local laird renamed the village St Abbs after the headland to the north.



Ordnance Survey maps for 1856 (top) and 1898 (bottom) showing the development of the village, including the change of name  
From the RGS-IBG Map Library



St Ebba carving at Northfield House  
© Rory Walsh

The St Abb's headland is named after the seventh century Abbess Æbbe (or St Ebba) who is said to have founded a monastery there. Rather strangely, the apostrophe is used when referring to the headland but not in the modern name of the village.

#### Directions 2

Follow the path down to the harbour, passing a tall house on the right. Turn right and stop at the edge of the harbour.

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### 3. Scaling up

## Old harbour

After the building of the initial cottages for fishing families, Coldingham Shore began to develop better infrastructure to support the fishing industry.

This square-shaped old harbour was built in 1832. It is 120 feet long and 105 feet across. Look down and you can see how it was constructed. The rocky shore was blasted away to form the deeper water for the harbour and the harbour walls were built up using blocks of stone with natural rock as foundations. This harbour could accommodate 12 deep sea boats.



Entrance to the old harbour  
© Martin Haslett

The fish caught included cod which were pickled and sent to London, and also haddock, turbot and lobsters which were transported by cart to Edinburgh. By the closing decades of the century, a fish-curing business had started in the village. This meant that fishermen could sell their catch directly to the curer rather than having to carry it several miles to the nearby town of Eyemouth for sale.



Left: Fishing boats at St Abbs Harbour (1900) Right: Fishwife in traditional costume (c.1910)  
© The John Wood Collection

A new and extended harbour was opened in 1890. This is the outer harbour beyond where we are standing, on the other side of the lifeboat station.

Construction work took 3 ½ years and employed nearly 100 men. Again it used the natural rock outcrops as a foundation but improved technology meant that it was mainly constructed of concrete rather than stone blocks.

There was accommodation for up to 100 boats which made it one of the best harbours between the Tyne and the Forth. It was also well-known to sailors as a place of refuge in storms.

The building of the two successive harbours led to a growth in the village with more cottages built. By the turn of the century the population of St Abbs had expanded to about 400 people.



Entrance to the outer harbour  
Callum Black, Geograph (CCL)



The aerial view shows the old inner harbour and the newer outer harbour  
as well as the treacherous rocks at the entrance  
David McAfee, Geograph (CCL)

### Directions 3

Proceed round the harbour. Stop by the lifeboat station.

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## 4. Loss of life

### St Abbs Lifeboat Station

Although the harbour is a safe haven the surrounding seas are treacherous. Look on the map and you will see that there are many rocks around the harbour entrance.

Many are large enough to be shown but there are also many smaller ones which are a danger to sailors.

Thus navigation in and out of St Abbs harbour has always been difficult and sadly not all vessels have had a safe passage.



The rocks are visible at low tide but concealed underwater at high tide presenting a danger to shipping  
© Martin Haslett

Unfortunately they were not able to get near the stricken steamer as it had shed its cargo of pit props which presented a deadly menace to the rescue craft.

Villagers could hear the cries for help and they stayed on the cliff tops all night but they could do nothing to help. The entire crew perished.

The next day it became clear that the Danish steamer had steered right into the centre of the rocks, which are submerged at high tide.

Rocks at the entrance to St Abbs harbour  
© Ordnance Survey

For example, during foggy weather in 1907, a Danish steamer hit the treacherous Ebbs Carr rocks just 400 yards off the shoreline.

Life boats – which in those days were propelled by oars – were launched from Eyemouth about two miles to the south and from Dunbar about 15 miles to the north.



Ship wreck at Eyemouth (c.1910)  
A similar scene to the wreck at St Abbs  
© The John Wood Collection

However some good came of this and other tragic events.

A lifeboat station was opened in 1911 and the new lifeboat, which was called Helen Smitton, was equipped with a modified car engine rather than oars.



Launch of the first lifeboat at St Abbs (1911)  
© The John Wood Collection



Rough seas at the harbour  
© Liza Cole / National Trust for Scotland

The station now operates an inshore B class Atlantic 75 lifeboat which is called out many times each year although most of the distress calls these days are from pleasure boats. Check on the station's website to find out about the most recent launches and rescues.



The lifeboat station today  
© Martin Haslett



One of the RNLB's B Class Atlantic 75 lifeboats  
Garry Knight, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

#### Directions 4

Retrace your steps around the harbour and pass the picnic area. At the junction with the road keep left past the public conveniences and go uphill. Where the lane bends to the left is a small seating area on the right with a memorial. Stop here.

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## 5. A light in the darkness

### East Coast Fishing Disaster Memorial

Despite advances in technology and navigation during Victorian times accidents happened. For example the Martello struck rocks off St Abbs in 1857 and sank, fortunately without loss of life.

This accident prompted the building of a lighthouse to aid navigation. The prominent position of St Abb's Head, visible from most parts of the Firth of Forth, made it an ideal site. It is just out of view from here but you might like to walk to it later.

The lighthouse opened in 1862 and in 1876 was chosen to pioneer the first fog signal to be installed at a Scottish lighthouse.



St Abbs light and forghorn  
Callum Black, Geograph (CCL)

It was a remote and lonely posting for the lighthouse keepers. There were no roads past the village so the best way to send supplies was by ship which had to moor off the headland. The stores for the lighthouse were brought ashore by tender which landed at a stone pier at Pettico Wick slightly to the west. The keepers would then transport the stores to the lighthouse.



East Coast Fishing Disaster Memorial showing women and children looking out to sea for the lost ships  
© Martin Haslett

Sadly the lighthouse did not prevent the loss of life.

This modern memorial commemorates the Great East Coast Fishing Disaster of 1881, known as Black Friday.

A severe windstorm struck the southern coast of Scotland and 189 fishermen drowned including three from Coldingham Shore.

Visit Eyemouth Museum to see a spectacular tapestry that tells the story of the tragedy.

#### Directions 5

Stay where you are but look down to the harbour below.



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## 6. A declining industry

### View from East Coast Fishing Disaster Memorial

The fishing industry has always experienced cycles with booms and subsequent busts.

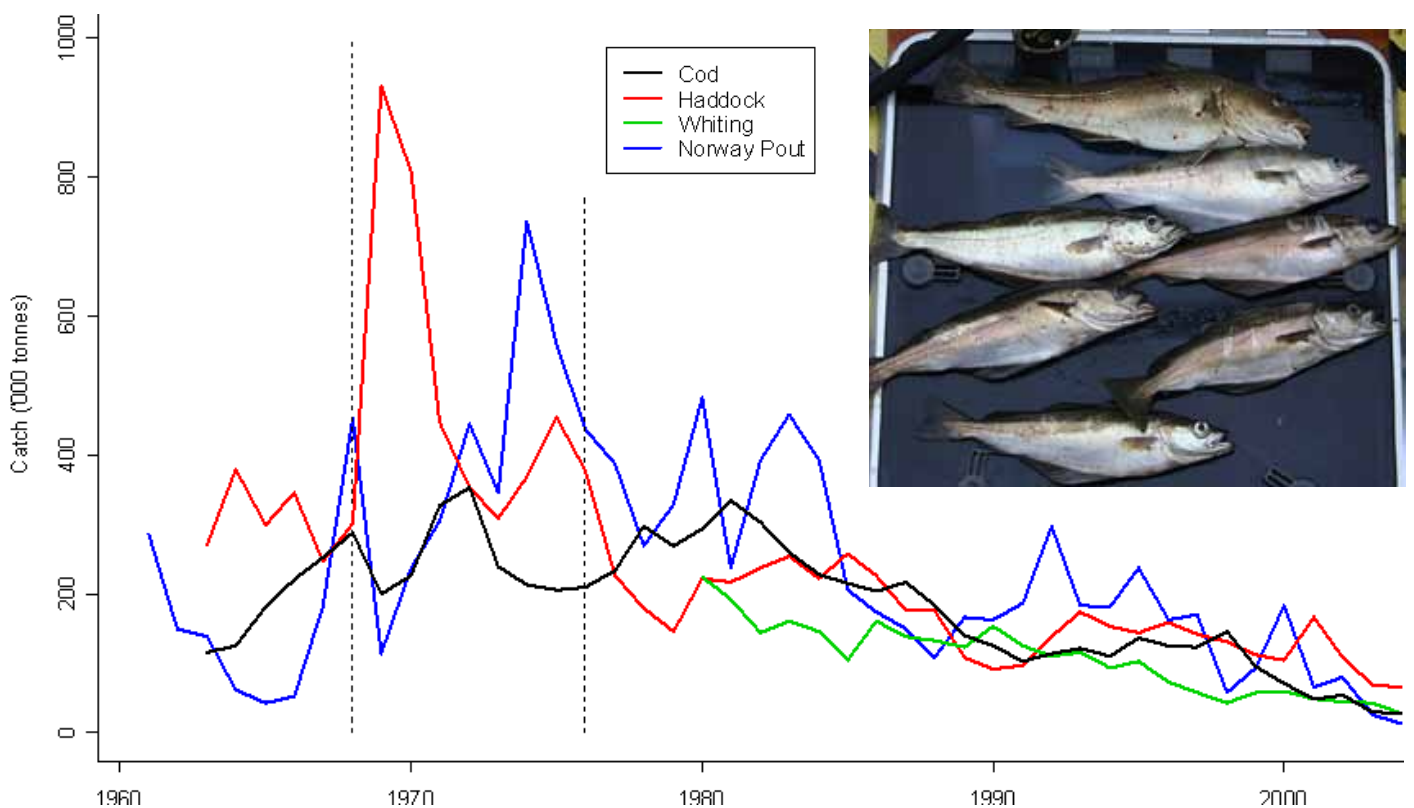
But it was during the 1970s that the industry went into serious decline and the workforce is now barely half of what it was then.

There were a number of reasons for this including the decline of fish stocks after many years of being heavily fished and the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy which opened Scottish waters to European vessels.

Now quotas severely restrict the catch in order to allow the fish stocks to recover.



The Exclusive Economic Zone of Scotland indicating where the state has special rights over the exploration and use of marine resources  
Kentynet, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)



Trends in landings of cod, haddock, whiting and Norway pout from the North Sea (1961-2004), Wikimedia Commons (CCL)  
Insert: A catch of pollack, coalfish and cod from Scottish waters, Des Colhoun, Geograph (CCL)

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These great changes have had their impact on St Abbs. Now there are just a few boats and a handful of men employed in fishing. Lobsters and crabs are the main catch.

The fishermen start their working day early in the morning and are out at sea for several hours hauling in their creels (lobster pots), some of which you will probably see at the harbour.

Nowadays just a few ports across Scotland have significant catches, notably Fraserburgh in Aberdeenshire, Lerwick in the Shetlands and Kinlochbervie on the northwest Highland coast.

Although the fishing industry is now a shadow of what it once was, Scottish waters are still some of the best fisheries in Europe and Scotland lands over 60 per cent of the UK's total fish catch.



The fishing industry at St Abbs is now a shadow of its former self and the harbour is usually quiet  
© Martin Haslett / Mark Hope, Geograph (CCL)

## Directions 6

Leave the memorial area, cross the road and continue into the unnamed lane. Stop near the parking area looking down on the harbour.

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## 7. New opportunities

### Parking area overlooking harbour

With the decline of fishing as an occupation, the reason for St Abbs' existence was slipping away. Whilst agriculture offered some employment there were few other opportunities in the area.

Local towns had limited job prospects while St Abbs was not well-located for travelling further afield.

For example, although the East Coast mainline is only a few miles inland there are no stations between Berwick and Dunbar.



Harvest bales in field near Northfield Farm  
Walter Baxter, Geograph (CCL)

With such limitations local residents looked to the natural assets of the village and its surroundings for economic opportunities: it has many charming cottages and a picturesque harbour; a spectacular location offers wonderful walks along the coastal paths; and there is a sandy beach at nearby Coldingham Bay. The village is also reasonably easy to reach being just off the A1. All these assets have made St Abbs into a tourist centre.

It is important to point out that the tourist industry didn't emerge from nowhere. Through the twentieth century there have been tourists visiting this area.

For example, an old photograph from the 1930s shows the car park at Coldingham Sands full of cars, coaches and charabancs, at what was clearly the height of the tourist season.

In an era when few people had the money for leisure this picture suggests that this area, even then, had its share of the tourist trade.

During subsequent years the two main strands of the local economy have changed places with tourism finally overtaking the fishing trade as the main source of employment. Income from tourism has meant a complete change for the village and St Abbs has not only survived, but thrived. You can easily see from here what an attraction the village is for visitors.

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#### Directions 7

Remain in the same place.

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## 8. Outsider invasion

### Parking area overlooking harbour

You may be surprised to learn that about a third of the dwellings in the village are holiday homes.

There are two types: houses owned by local people who let them to visitors and second homes for people who have their main home elsewhere and come to St Abbs for holidays. This has brought enormous social changes to the village.

An old lady who had lived in the village all her life remarked on the dramatic changes over previous decades:

“Once I knew every single person in the village. I knew every family and what their father did for a living. Now I know nobody. So many of the cottages are empty most of the time and when they are occupied it is by outsiders.”



One third of dwellings are holiday homes  
© Martin Haslett



Picturesque house in the village  
© Martin Haslett

There is a danger that the local community can feel swamped by visitors especially when these people may have very different social attitudes. For example, visitors are likely to be much more prosperous and have a different outlook on life.

Visitors are also unlikely to take part in community activities. Since only a proportion of the houses are occupied by permanent residents, the social and community life of the village is diminished.

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#### Directions 8

Continue along the lane and stop at the end above the telephone box. Look along the row of houses ahead.

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## 9. Pros and cons

### View along Seaview Terrace near the telephone box

Nationwide there is a lot of debate about the impact of second-home owners. On the one hand the demand for second homes in picturesque locations can price local people out of the housing market.

This has certainly happened in some areas, the central part of the English Lake District being a good example. Local people working in agriculture or seasonal tourism occupations cannot afford to buy houses in areas where the price has been pushed up by wealthy city dwellers looking for an idyllic weekend retreat.



Seaview Terrace  
© Martin Haslett

On the other hand there are other cases where there is very little local demand for property so the purchase of empty properties by outsiders for use as second homes has significantly boosted the local economy. The injection of money sometimes includes the renovation of buildings such as old barns; investments that locals may not have been willing or able to make.

There is more controversy about how much money visitors spend in the local community. Some holiday makers bring all their provisions with them, having shopped at a cheap supermarket at home, thereby not spending much money at the more expensive village shop. Other visitors make a deliberate point of using local shops, despite the additional cost, in order to support local businesses. More recently, visitors are ordering their groceries online to be delivered to their holiday home; this at least supports the local supermarket's delivery service.

It is important to distinguish between the different economic consequences of locally-owned holiday homes and second homes owned by non-residents. Rent from a locally-owned cottage is money that stays in the local community whereas any income from a second home being rented is lost to the local community. However, second home owners often spend money in the local community by employing caretakers and cleaners for their home and use local businesses for maintenance and improvement works. As ever with economic and social issues there is no simple answer!

#### Directions 9

Follow the lane round to the right then turn immediately left into Murrayfield. Stop outside the village shop on the left.

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## 10. The shop that sells everything

### St Abbs Post Office and shop, 1 Murrayfield

Shops in small villages have diversified in recent years in order to remain viable businesses. This shop not only sells milk, bread, fresh fruit and vegetables but also newspapers, souvenirs, postcards, local maps, children's books and cups of coffee. There is also a free cash machine and a branch post office.

All this is not so unusual in a rural area but this shop has one more side-line: it sells diving equipment. You can buy anything from snorkels, gloves, torches, watches, masks and regulators to compasses, fins, weights, marker buoys, flags and pressure hoses!



The village shop and Post Office on Murrayfield  
© Martin Haslett



Kit yourself out for a dive...  
at the Post Office!  
Mark Murphy, Wikimedia (CCL)

If there is anything they haven't got they can order it. What's more, they also operate a dive repair service in return for a contribution to the St Abbs Lifeboat.

This is a very good example of the way in which village shops have adapted to changing patterns of village life.

They still provide a vital service to the local community but also embrace the new economy of the village by offering visitors traditional food and provisions as well as every sort of holiday requirement.



The village shop sign  
© Rory Walsh

#### Directions 10

Retrace your steps back along Murrayfield. At the end turn left and then immediately right into Briery Law. Stop when you reach the putting green on the left side.

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## 11. Hole in one

### Putting green, Briery Law

For much of the rest of this walk we are going to see how this village has risen to the challenge of change.

This includes many examples of how the local community has come together for the good of the local residents.

The first example is this putting green. For many years local volunteers had been maintaining the green using old and heavy equipment.



Putting green  
© Martin Haslett



One of the holes  
© Martin Haslett

In 2010 the St Abbs Community Trust applied to the Big Lottery Fund for help to renovate the putting green. The Big Lottery Fund is responsible for distributing 40 per cent of all funds raised for good causes by the National Lottery. That amounts to about 11 pence of every pound spent on a Lottery ticket. The fund distributes around £600 million each year.

The Community Trust was successful in its bid and purchased two new mowers for the green. New putters, balls, flags and markers completed the renovation and, most importantly, a new shed was built with a veranda allowing people to take refuge from the rain.

The green is run by volunteers and is available for use by residents and visitors alike. You can borrow balls and putters from the village shop – where else?!

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#### Directions 11

Continue to the end of Briery Law. Stop outside the old school which is the last building on the left.

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## 12. No more school lessons

### The Ebba Centre and Old School Café, corner of Briery Law and Coldingham Road

The Ebba Centre is another community-based venture which makes use of the old school as a village hall and meeting place.

The hall is available to hire for local events and is used for pilates classes, a pensioners' lunch club, a knitting group, table tennis and badminton. You can also exchange second hand books.

The hall is also the home of the St Abbs Market which brings a variety of traders into the village each Friday between Easter and December.



The Ebba Centre at the old school  
© Martin Haslett



The Old School Café  
© Martin Haslett

Local producers sell food such as cakes, flavoured oils, fresh fish, bread, smoked cheese and chocolates, as well as crafts and fashion accessories.

The St Abbs Market also tours other locations, for example offering a craft and local products stall for a community event or a Christmas Fayre for company employees.

Another part of the building has become the Old School Cafe offering home-made baking, light lunches and refreshment. It's one of several good places in the village for people to enjoy a break.

#### Directions 12

With the school behind you turn left along Coldingham Road. There is no pavement on the first section so do take care but after about 50 metres you can go through the wall on the left and use the footpath running parallel to the road. After about 100 metres this path changes to the other side of the road. Continue following the path until you reach a cluster of farm buildings.



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## 13. Old buildings, new uses

### Northfield Farm

The buildings here at Northfield Farm have been converted into a number of new uses. Each of the enterprises encourage visitors to come to St Abbs and spend money whilst they are here.

Number Four is a contemporary art and craft gallery which displays and sells art by living artists. Seaside places are often a magnet for artists attracted by the coastal scenery and light for inspiration and the chance of selling their work to visitors. In this case the work shown in the gallery is from local artists and others from across Britain.



Northfield Farm  
© Martin Haslett

The choice here is wide from paintings, ceramic and sculpture to jewellery, wood, glass and printing. The gallery says that it aims to make art affordable and it belongs to a scheme called Own Art which offers interest free credit for people to buy contemporary art and craft.

Another part of the farm is the Old Smiddy which is now a coffee shop and restaurant. It prides itself on serving homemade food using local produce. A further building has been converted into Woolfish, a yarn and textile shop that also holds knitting 'retreats' so that people can spend a few days dedicated to knitting and eating good food.

A little further along is the National Trust for Scotland car park for people walking to St Abb's Head.



Bales in the fields of Northfield Farm © Rory Walsh

#### Directions 13

Retrace your steps along Coldingham Road. At the junction with Briery Law continue straight on. Stop outside the St Abbs Visitor Centre on the left.

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## 14. In local hands

### St Abbs Visitor Centre, Coldingham Road

While the people of St Abbs recognise that the local economy rests primarily on tourism and that holiday homes form an important source of income for the village, they are determined to keep a real sense of community.

The St Abbs Community Trust was established to promote the general good of the community of St Abbs and to protect its assets.



The Visitor Centre perched above the harbour  
H4hwn, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

In their own words: “The village is a strong community, focused on sustaining community assets that will help to maintain the employment, growth and wellbeing of the local population, ensuring the regeneration of our community.”

A good example of this is the Visitor Centre. The old village hall was purchased in 2008 with the help of a private donation and the St Abbs Visitor Centre was established as an independent charity. A lot of conversion work was done to make the building suitable for its new use before its opening in 2011. The centre is not run by the local authority (as many are) but rather by the local community.

Do go in to the centre either now or after the walk. In addition to the main exhibition area there is information about the history of the village, the geology and wildlife of the area. There is also a high-powered telescope to view the cliffs and wildlife, activities for children and a gift shop. The centre also exhibits photographs, artwork and crafts by local artists.

#### Directions 14

With the Visitor Centre behind you look down into the harbour. To the right of the harbour is a café in a small stone building. Take the steps from the Visitor Centre or follow the road to reach it. Stop when you are outside.

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## 15. Entrepreneurial spirit

### Ebb Carrs Café, The Harbour

This building was originally a smokehouse where herrings were smoked over a fire and made into kippers.

It's a traditional way of preserving fish but sadly kippers have become less popular despite their health-giving properties.

The building was restored by the current owners who turned it into a café named after a cluster of rocks just offshore.

The family that runs the café makes a living from various tourist activities.



Ebb Carrs Café  
© Martin Haslett



Dive boat on its way back to St Abbs  
Lisa Jarvis, Geograph (CCL)

They rent a cottage to visitors, offer bed and breakfast and run 'Dive St Abbs', a company that offers diving excursions, sightseeing trips and fishing groups. It is an example of the entrepreneurial spirit keeping the local economy alive.

We have seen the many ways in which St Abbs has embraced the changes from fishing village to tourist centre and how the local community has found ways both to attract tourists and to encourage them to spend money.

At our next two stops we will find out how the wider St Abbs area contributes to the tourist attractions of the village.

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#### Directions 15

From the café walk down to the harbour. Follow the edge of the harbour and then go up the concrete steps so that you have a view over the harbour wall.

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## 16. Seabird sanctuary

### Harbour wall looking towards St Abbs Head

Look north at the spectacular coastal scenery towards St Abb's Head. This craggy landscape was formed about 400 million years ago; hard rocks formed by volcanic action have resisted erosion by the sea and now form the headland.



These rocky formations are ideal homes for seabirds. The ledges on the sheer cliffs high above the waves are good nesting sites but you may see some colonies on offshore stacks which offer protection against some predators.

Guillemots on Foul Carr  
© Liza Cole / National Trust for Scotland

This natural environment makes St Abb's Head one of the most important seabird colonies in the country particularly known for guillemots, kittiwakes, razorbills, shags, fulmars, herring gulls and puffins.

The ecological importance of the area has been confirmed by the designation of St Abb's Head as a National Nature Reserve, one of over 50 in Scotland. It is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Protection Area for its seabird interest. St Abb's Head is owned and managed by The National Trust for Scotland.

A walk over St Abb's Head is highly recommended. Even if you are not especially interested in birds, it's a fantastic walk with wonderful coastal scenery.



Fulmar (left) and shag (right)  
© Jack Ibboston / National Trust for Scotland

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#### Directions 16

Return down the steps. Turn left and stop at the end of the harbour wall.

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## 17. Underwater wonders

### Harbour wall looking out to sea

It's not only the landscape of St Abb's Head that is spectacular; equally dramatic is the landscape offshore, under water.

Look out to sea or on the map and you will see many rocky reefs above the waterline.

This varied landscape continues beneath the waves, with dramatic intertidal and sub-tidal rocky reefs, extensive sand and mud flats, great arches and mysterious sea caves.

These coastal waters receive both cold Arctic and warm Gulf Stream currents.

As a result, there is an incredibly rich assemblage of marine life including natural rock pool aquariums, swaying kelp forests, delicate sea grass, dense mussel beds and grey seals. In fact this is one of the most important areas in Europe for marine conservation.

The St Abbs and Eyemouth Voluntary Marine Reserve was established in 1984 to protect this area. It extends from St Abb's Head to Eyemouth and out to sea to the 50 metre depth contour.

While certain types of fishing are banned the designation gives no statutory protection but its value is enhanced by the fact that it lies within the Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast European Marine Site which was designated under the EU Habitats Directive.

This is thought to be the finest underwater scenery around the British coast. This fact, together with clean and clear water due to its distance from major cities or industries, has made St Abbs into an important centre for diving.

Whether interested in the underwater landscape, marine wildlife or sunken ships there is much to offer any reasonably experienced diver. Look around the harbour to see the number of adverts for diving trips.



Diver on reef

© St Abbs and Eyemouth Voluntary Marine Reserve

#### Directions 17

Return to Ebb Carrs Café. With the cafe to your left follow the path back to the old harbour. Keep right, ignoring the steps to the right, and stop outside St Abbs Marine Station.

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## 18. A new asset

### St Abbs Marine Station, The Harbour

The remarkable marine habitat off St Abbs has brought a new asset to the village. This is the St Abbs Marine Station, founded in 2010 as an independent research institution.

It is staffed by experienced marine scientists who collaborate with universities and commercial partners with similar interests.

Look through the gate to see the facilities. The main building was originally a bothy used by fishermen: they would store their nets on the ground floor and sleep upstairs.



St Abbs Marine Station  
© Martin Haslett

A long fish-filleting building with stone slab sloping to the sea was to the north of the site. Now the buildings and site have been redesigned with specialist facilities.

The offices are immediately in front with the main aquarium partially hidden from view behind. The aquarium has a roof that allows natural light to penetrate so that conditions can be as close to natural as possible. To the right is the 'mesocosm', a smaller aquarium designed to replicate the natural environment under controlled conditions. This has an undercover working area and a 100,000 litre tank. Both aquaria have a constant supply of fresh seawater.

These research facilities are a major boost for St Abbs. The centre also hosts events, workshops and conferences with themes as diverse as marine conservation, hatchery techniques, biodiversity and plankton. There are also opportunities for the local community to be involved in its work.

The Marine Station has high hopes of being a centre of excellence for marine research and its establishment does mean that the future economy of St Abbs might be based on more than tourism and a little fishing.

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#### Directions 18

Return to the old harbour.

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## 19. Old harbour, new role

### Old harbour

Although times have changed the harbour is still the centre of village life. Alongside the few commercial fishing vessels, most of the boats using it are related to tourism.

During the summer months charter boats take parties of divers out to different sites both nearby and further afield along the Berwickshire Coast. There are also fishing trips on offer to visitors.

All this is made possible by St Abbs Harbour Trust which is a non-profit making organisation responsible for maintaining and managing the harbour for the community.



Advertisements for diving and fishing trips  
© Martin Haslett

The costs of maintenance and employing the Harbour Master are covered by mooring and launching fees which must be paid by every vessel using the harbour. Visitor parking charges also make a contribution so if you have used the harbour car park you have made a small contribution to its upkeep.



Calm waters inside St Abbs harbour  
© Martin Haslett

**Directions 19**  
Remain at the harbour.

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## 20. Embracing change

### Old harbour

On this walk we have seen how enormous social and economic changes have affected St Abbs, particularly during the twentieth century.

The sea has always provided the sustenance for the village. Following the decline of the fishing industry the village turned to tourism making the most of the attractions of the coastal and marine landscape.

We have seen how the local community has taken up the challenges that all this change has brought. We have seen local businesses adapting to new roles and new enterprises established. And we have discovered how holiday homes and second homes can have both positive and negative effects on the local community.

We've seen a community that seems to be thriving and this is reflected in a rising population. The number of residents has increased from 85 in 2005 to 139 just five years later and there are now more children in the village.

All small communities have to adapt to changing times. It seems that St Abbs has embraced a changing economy and the future for the village looks more hopeful than it has for many years.



St Abbs at dusk  
© Rory Walsh

#### Directions 20

If it is safe to do so, you may like to take the opportunity to walk along the wall of the 'new' harbour to enjoy views back across the village.



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## **Further information**

### **St Abbs Visitor Centre**

[www.stabbsvisitorcentre.co.uk](http://www.stabbsvisitorcentre.co.uk)

### **St Abbs Community website**

[www.stabbs.org](http://www.stabbs.org)

### **St Abbs Community Trust**

[st-abbs-community-trust.weebly.com](http://st-abbs-community-trust.weebly.com)

### **St Abbs Market**

[www.st-abbs-market.com](http://www.st-abbs-market.com)

### **St Abbs Lifeboat Station**

[rnli.org/findmynearest/station/Pages/St-Abbs-Lifeboat-Station](http://rnli.org/findmynearest/station/Pages/St-Abbs-Lifeboat-Station)

### **St Abb's Head Lighthouse**

[www.nlb.org.uk/LighthouseLibrary/Lighthouse/St--Abbs-Head](http://www.nlb.org.uk/LighthouseLibrary/Lighthouse/St--Abbs-Head)

### **St Abb's Head National Nature Reserve**

[www.nts.org.uk/Property/St-Abbs-Head-National-Nature-Reserve](http://www.nts.org.uk/Property/St-Abbs-Head-National-Nature-Reserve)

### **Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast European Marine Site**

[www.xbordercurrents.co.uk](http://www.xbordercurrents.co.uk)

### **St Abbs and Eyemouth Voluntary Marine Reserve**

[www.marine-reserve.co.uk](http://www.marine-reserve.co.uk)

### **St Abbs Marine Station**

[www.marinestation.co.uk](http://www.marinestation.co.uk)

### **Dive St Abbs**

[www.divestabbs.info](http://www.divestabbs.info)

### **History of the fishing industry in Scotland**

[www.scotfishmuseum.org/history-of-the-fishing-industry](http://www.scotfishmuseum.org/history-of-the-fishing-industry)

### **Eyemouth Museum**

[www.eyemouthmuseum.org](http://www.eyemouthmuseum.org)

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St Abbs harbour  
Janis Cornwall, Geograph (CCL)

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