



History of Torbay

Torbay is a borough in Devon, England, administered by the unitary authority of Torbay Council. It consists of 24.27 square miles of land, spanning the towns of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham, located around an east-facing natural harbour (Tor Bay) on the English Channel. A popular tourist destination with a tight conurbation of resort towns, Torbay's sandy beaches, mild climate and recreational and leisure attractions have given rise to the nickname of the English Riviera.

Council & Mayoralty

The County Borough of Torbay, *Torbay Borough Council* was created in 1968 by the amalgamation of the Municipal Borough of Torquay, Urban Districts of Paignton and Brixham, and taking in parts of the civil parishes of Coffinswell and Kerswells from Newton Abbot Rural District and Churston Ferrers and Marldon from Totnes Rural District. This in turn became Torbay District Council under the Local Government Act 1972. The current local authority was first elected in 1973, a year before formally coming into its powers and prior to the creation of the District of Torbay on 1 April 1974. The council gained borough status, entitling it to be known as *Torbay Borough Council* and to annually appoint a Mayor of Torbay. Since gaining county council functions in 1998 the council has gone by the name *Torbay Council*.

On 14 July 2005 Torbay held a referendum to decide on the executive arrangements of the borough. The result was in favour of the mayor and cabinet model, which is unusual in the English local government system. The first directly elected mayor of Torbay was elected in 2005. The previously existing civic Mayor of Torbay role was renamed 'Chairman of the Council' and they wear the Chain of Office and Robes of a Mayor. The elected Mayoral system is to be disbanded in 2019 following a further referendum held in May 2016.

History

That the Torbay area has been inhabited since Paleolithic times is shown by human bones and tools found in Kents Cavern in Torquay. A maxilla fragment known as Kents Cavern 4 may be the oldest example of a modern human in Europe, dating back to 37,000–40,000 years ago. Roman soldiers are known to have visited Torquay during the period when Britain was a part of the Roman Empire, leaving offerings at a curious rock formation in Kent's Cavern, known as "The Face".

Both Brixham and Paignton appear in the Domesday Book of 1086 and Paignton was given the status of a borough having a market and fair in 1294. The first major building in Torquay was Torre Abbey, a Premonstratensian monastery founded in 1196. William Prince of Orange (afterwards King William III) landed in Brixham on 5 November 1688, during the Glorious Revolution, and issued his famous declaration "The Liberties of England and The Protestant Religion I Will Maintain".

Torquay's economy was, like Brixham's, initially based on fishing and agriculture, but in the early 19th century it began to develop into a fashionable seaside resort, initially frequented by members of the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars while the Royal Navy anchored in Tor Bay and later, as the town's fame spread, by Victorian society.

The historic part of Paignton is inland: the low-lying coastal fringe was originally salt marsh. Kirkham House is a late medieval stone house which is open to the public at certain times of year, and the Coverdale Tower adjacent to Paignton Parish Church is named after Bishop Miles Coverdale, who published an English translation of the Bible in 1536. Paignton remained a small fishing village until the early 19th century; a new harbour was built here in 1837.

The second phase in the urban expansion of the area began when Torre railway station was opened in December 1848. The railway was extended to Torquay Seafront station in 1858, Paignton in 1859 and to Brixham in 1861. As a result of its expansion, Torquay was granted borough status in 1872, and 1902 saw its first marketing campaign to summer tourists. Tor Bay hosted the sailing events for the 1948 Summer Olympics in London.

Geography

There are three main towns around the marine inlet of Tor Bay: Torquay in the north, Paignton in the centre, and Brixham in the south. These have become connected over the years, swallowing up villages and towns such as St Marychurch, Cockington, Churston Ferrers and Galmpton, though the latter maintains a rural feel thanks to tight conservation measures. The borough of Torbay is bordered by the South Hams to the south and west, and by Teignbridge to the north. Nearby towns include Totnes and Dartmouth in the South Hams, and Newton Abbot and Teignmouth in Teignbridge.

The southern limit of Tor Bay is Berry Head, and the northern limit is Hope's Nose, although Torquay itself stretches further north into Babbacombe Bay, where the beaches at Oddicombe, Babbacombe and Maidencombe can be found; these are noted for their interesting Breccia cliffs. Torbay's many geological features have led to the establishment of the English Riviera Geopark; as of July 2008, this is the sole urban geopark of the 53 geoparks worldwide.

Because of the mild climate, Torbay palm trees are a common sight along the coast. However, these are in fact not palms but *Cordyline australis*, originating from New Zealand where it is known as "cabbage tree". These trees also flourish elsewhere in the UK. It is suggested that the popularity of cabbage trees in Torbay is attributable to their first being introduced to the UK in that region.

Torbay includes:

- Torquay including suburbs
- Paignton including suburbs
- Brixham including suburbs
- Maidencombe
- Yalberton
- Blagdon
- Churston Ferrers
- Galmpton