

## Unlocking our Coastal Heritage Hallsands Interpretation Panels



The ruined village of Hallsands, devastated in a storm in 1917, is an iconic site on the rocky South Devon coast close to Start Point. Its shingle beach was dredged at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in order to provide aggregate to develop Plymouth docks in a time of increasing European tension and the lead up to the 1st World War. The result was that the village, built on a wave-cut platform ledge above sea level, no longer had a protective layer of shingle which had previously

helped to absorb the power of the waves. The village was abandoned after the storm and has gradually deteriorated since. The site became increasingly dangerous and eventually public access was prevented and a viewing platform was built with some limited interpretation in place which has deteriorated substantially.

The project's aim was to take advantage of the superb vantage point provided by the platform, increase the scope of the interpretation, as well as linking in with a trail of new interpretation being provided in Start Bay as part of a South Devon Coastal Local Action Group (LAG) project.

The new interpretation was seen as an opportunity to capture a number of narratives relevant to Hallsands:

- Why the village was there.
- The importance of the geomorphology of the site and how ignorance of this led to its demise.
- Coastal change processes.
- The (previously) sustainable nature of rural villages at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.
- The occupations and lives of the inhabitants.
- The well-known local residents, the Trout sisters.
- How world events can shape even a remote rural village.
- The political battle to get compensation which caught the imagination of the people of the South West.
- The story of the public enquiry.

The Hallsands story is an important one locally and well known nationally. We were clear that the interpretation had to be done accurately, sensitively and imaginatively. Our invitation to tender received 6 bids for the project an additional 3 companies declined to bid. The bids were assessed on the basis of perceived durability, creativity and value for money. Contractors *Arc Creative* were selected, one of three that had proposed basing the work around a marine-grade stainless steel base reflecting the need to resist the exposed nature of the site.

## **Project Benefits**

The completed project adds a considerable amount of additional information to an iconic site where there was previously very little.

The project lies on the South West Coast Path and contributes to visitors' appreciation of the human and physical geography of the area. The signage links to the SWCP.

The information links into a string of other pieces of interpretation along this stretch of coast, creating a trail of additional information available to visitors.

The story has huge local significance. The new interpretation means that for the first time the whole story including, how the village residents' concerns were ignored, can be told.

A nearby rock-fall further down the access path made a temporary closure necessary but ensured that, once re-opened, the new interpretation got wide local and regional coverage.

Press coverage of the platform :

<http://www.thisissouthdevon.co.uk/ahead-Hallsands-viewing-platform-open/story-16218131-detail/story.html>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-devon-18249561>

## **Any problems**

The project presented a number of challenges :

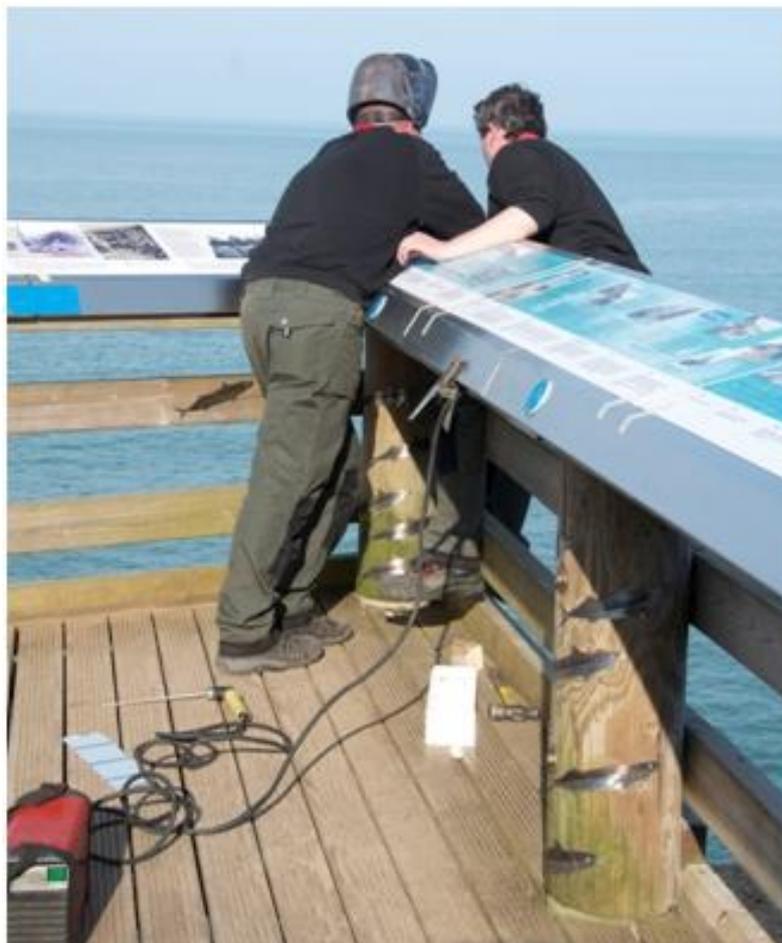
- The sheer scale of it meant that it was around 8 times bigger than any interpretation panels previously undertaken. The time taken to gather the source material, research this, order it and present it in an interesting yet detailed way was enormously time-consuming.
- The size also created problems in terms of checking the graphics sent over by the contractors. The proofs were difficult to read on screen and invariably had to be printed off.
- As ever with a piece of local history, there was more than one version of events which meant that language had to be carefully chosen. A conscious attempt was made to ensure that a clear neutral view of the course of events was presented.

## **Added Value**

The project was undertaken at the same time as a number of other interpretation panels along the same stretch of coastline. As a result this is linked into an 'interpretation trail' and is referenced from a number of other places. There are plans to provide an official opening and link it to a local schools drama workshop. It

will also be highlighted in the Slapton Line Newsletter, and reference from the South Devon AONB website and the Slapton Line website.

The site is frequently visited by schools, colleges and universities taking part in courses at the Slapton Ley Field Centre.





## explore start bay Hallsands

This interpretation point tells the story of Hallsands Village. You can see the remains of the village from the viewing platform and the panels will help you understand what happened here.

There is also an audio trail of Start Bay. For the price of a local call, you can hear personal stories from the time. Simply dial **01548 802315**, then the three digit number next to the subject:

**The loss of the Village** – dial 907      **Ella Trout and the Shipwreck** – dial 941

Alternatively you can find them online at [www.explorestartbay.org](http://www.explorestartbay.org)



Thanks to all the people who have helped.  
 Images - Colerworth Museum, Kingsbridge; Torquay Museum; The Devon; Plymouth Record Office; Robin Rose Punter; Paul Why; and Mike Lubbers.  
 Research and reading - Hallsands, a personal history - Kathy Davies and Peter Walsh; Sisters against the sea - Ruth and Frank Milson; The tragedy of Hallsands village - John L Harvey; Hallsands, a village betrayed - Steve Mellis; [www.hallsands.org.uk](http://www.hallsands.org.uk); [www.bbc.co.uk/devon](http://www.bbc.co.uk/devon)

This panel is part of a series telling the story of the area - Explore Start Bay. Panels and trails can be found along the coastal path around the bay or by visiting [www.explorestartbay.org](http://www.explorestartbay.org). This project is run by the Slapton Line Partnership [www.slaptonline.org](http://www.slaptonline.org) working with the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit.



The South West Coast Path is one of the best trails to be found in the world.

Taking in 630 miles, it runs from Minehead in Somerset, on the north coast to the shores of Poole Harbour in Dorset, on the south coast.

The Coast path is a great way to explore the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. With fantastic scenery, secluded coves, golden beaches, dramatic cliffs, traditional villages and amazing estuaries, there is something for everyone.

The coast path website is a brilliant resource for planning your route along the trail with maps, ideas for walks and places to stay.

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