MAP INSIDE

West Wight Heritage Trail

West Wight is notable for stunning, unspoilt coastal landscapes and havens for wildlife. In addition to this natural beauty, or more likely because of it, many extraordinary historical figures have been attracted to the area, especially Freshwater Bay.

The Victorian period saw a boom in visitors to the locale, with many being the most eminent and influential in their fields.

This guide lets the modern day visitor explore the well-trodden path of many who have come before. Properties and famous historical individuals are mentioned, but you can find out more details online should you be inspired. Detailed directions are also available online should you need them:
stayfreshwaterbay.co.uk/heritagetrail

You can walk or cycle all or part of the route at your own pace. Much of it is in areas designated as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

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West Wight

Alum Bay 1

The Marconi Monument, at the location where Guglielmo Marconi sent the very first wireless transmission in 1897. Further experiments resulted in communications between Marconi at Alum Bay and Queen Victoria at Osborne House in 1898 which enabled all radio and telecommunications used today.

Needles Old Battery 2

A Palmerston Fort built to defend against French attacks. While never needed during the Victorian period, it was used during both World Wars. The National Trust site has historical information and provides unrivalled views of the Needles.

Rocket Testing Site 3

Between the 1950s and 1970s, Black Arrow and Black Knight, part of a secret British rocket project, were tested here. You can find out more about the project at the Needles New Battery.

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Tennyson Monument 4

Standing at 147m above sea level on the highest point on Tennyson Down, this memorial to Alfred Lord Tennyson celebrates the spot that inspired much of his work. It sits on the site of the old Nodes Beacon. A replica and plaque to this can be seen down the hill towards the Needles.

Farringford 5

Farringford was the Island home of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, perhaps the most famous poet of the Victorian Era. Inspired by the West Wight landscape and looking for a peaceful place to escape his fans, the Poet Laurate and his wife Emily made Farringford their family home in 1853. It's now a museum to his life.

The Bay B&B 6

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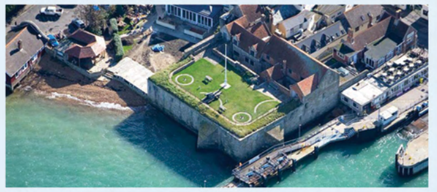
Many of the Victorian houses in Freshwater Bay have switched between private homes and holiday accommodation. In its time, the Bay Boutique Bed and Breakfast has also been accommodation for World War II troops, Portsmouth evacuees, a convalescence home for soldiers and a maternity hospital.

Fort Victoria 7

Robert Hooke, born 1635 in Freshwater, was a scientist most famous, perhaps, for discovering the cell. He was also an inventor, anatomist, astronomer and a pioneer in geology, meteorology and microscopy. He even worked to restore the City of London after the Great Fire of 1666. An exhibition can be seen at The Island Planetarium, Fort Victoria. Hooke's family home no longer exists, but was located behind what is now Heatherstone House on Hooke Hill.

Yarmouth Castle 8



Yarmouth Castle is an English Heritage site, built in 1547 by order of Henry VIII to protect the Solent from the French.

Golden Hill Fort 9

Built in the 19th Century principally as a garrison for the West Wight coastal forts and batteries, it also served as a protective defence, with guns mounted on the roof.
In the First World War the fort was used as an infantry training depot. In 1915, a newly commissioned Second Lieutenant, Alan Alexander Milne, arrived to join the 4th Battalion of the 11th Royal Warwickshire Regiment. He was a most unlikely soldier, as he held strong and unfashionable views as a pacifist. Could the old woodland have been an inspiration for Hundred Acre Wood from his literary classic Winnie the Pooh?

"She thinks of nothing but the Isle of Wight, and she calls it the Island, as if there were not another island in the world."

Jane Austen, Mansfield Park

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