

Dartmouth began to assume importance as a port after the Norman Conquest. In 1147 it had become of sufficient consequence to be the rendezvous for the great European fleet assembled for the Second Crusade.

In 1190 Richard I gathered together at Dartmouth an even more powerful fleet for the THIRD CRUSADE. Dartmouth also provided 31 ships and 757 mariners for the fleet which accompanied Edward III to the siege of Calais in 1346.

The dowry which Eleanor of Aquitaine brought to the English crown on her marriage to Henry II included the port of Bordeaux and, as a result, a brisk trade in the importation of wine from that port into Dartmouth sprang up.

This wine trade, in addition to firmly establishing Dartmouth as a port, was the vital factor in bringing Dartmouth and the Customs together, for the "prisage of wine" <sup>formed</sup> ~~formed~~ part of the "Ancient and Rightful Customs". Indeed, the wine trade of Dartmouth became so important that in the 14th century one of the Dartmouth merchants was appointed Deputy to the Chief Butler of England for the counties of Dorset, Devon and Cornwall.

*Controlled by  
Customs & Excise*

A famous Customs Officer, Geoffrey Chaucer, is said to have visited Dartmouth in 1373 and, as a result of this visit, to have written his well-known description of the "Schipman" (seaman) of Dart-mouthe. Many years later, Daniel Defoe, another member of this department, on his visit to Dartmouth in 1724, described the trade of the port, stating that there were "very flourishing merchants, who traded very prosperously, and to the most considerable parts of Spain, Portugal, Italy and the Plantations; but especially they are great traders to Newfoundland, and from thence to Spain and Italy with fish; and they drive a good trade also on their own fishery of pilchards, which is hereabouts carried on with the greatest number of vessels of any western port except Falmouth."

According to Customs records ~~of 1565~~, in 1565, 258 ships were entered into Dartmouth and 221 sailed.

When the present Dartmouth Custom House was built in 1739, smuggling was at its height in this area and, as a matter of fact, the principal reason for building the new custom House then was on account of the lack of room for seized goods in the old one.

At a time when communication was difficult and unreliable and before the days of an organized police force, it was natural that the Customs service should be used as a channel of official communication to the public as for instance when in 1743 in a letter from the Board of Customs to the Collector at Dartmouth dated the 23rd March, the Collector is instructed to inform the Merchants of the port that war had been declared by France against England and "they(the merchants) may take the necessary precautions for the security of their vessels and effects".

The Customs cutters of those days saw a great deal of action both in the war against smugglers and also against the enemies of the King. ~~XXXX~~ The "Spider" was appointed to Dartmouth in 1783 "to cruise against the smugglers between Portland East and the Ram Head West", she was also furnished with Letters of Marque against the French, Spaniards and Dutch." We read in the Customs records of this time of an attack by about 100 smugglers on the captain and crew of the "Spider"(pp.69-70). We also read of a report on an enquiry into the death of one of the Dartmouth officers, one Richard Cullin, wherein it was stated that the "said Cullin was thrown over the cliff by some smugglers." In connection with this case it was reported that at the Coroner's Inquest the verdict was "Accidental death".

It is only to be expected that Dartmouth, with its long connection with Customs and Customs vessels, should have been responsible for building some of these vessels. Among others we can cite the "Corona", the "Tartar", the "Solent" and more recently, in 1906, the "Alert"(These are all launches. I can find no record of a revenue cruiser or cutter being built at Dartmouth)

The last of the revenue cruisers to be stationed at Dartmouth was the "Wickham", built by Richard Pinnery of Poole ~~and~~ to Custom's specification and commissioned in 1847. When the Coastguard Service was transferred from the Customs to the Admiralty in 1856 the "Wickham" remained at Dartmouth for a time and eventually became a tender to H.M.S. "Blenheim" in 1860.

Revenue Vessels at Dartmouth. (*Cutters and Cruisers*)

1733/48	Princess Royal	
1735	Henry & Margaret	
1755	Hind	
1783	Spider	
1802	Industry	
1807	Beagle (rechristened Adder)	
1822	Dolphin	68 tons
1830	Adder	73 tons (60 tons in 1836 Register)
1839	Lion	82 tons (80 tons in 1821/4 Register)
1839	Royal Charlotte	130 tons
1842	Vulcan	325 tons (but 200 tons in Historical Notes on the Coastguard Service)
1844	Defence (formerly Excise Cutter "Lively")	130 tons (126 tons in some Registers)
1850/57	Wickham	100 tons (became a tender to H.M.S. Blenheim)