

Broad Character: Ports and Docks

Character Type: Ports and Docks

Irish Sea Regional Perspective

Introduction: Defining/Distinguishing Attributes

England's coastline facing the Irish Sea is long and greatly indented, with numerous streams and rivers providing potential sheltered sites for harbours. Much of the sea traffic here was coastal and limited to small vessels which could navigate through the shallow waters and shifting shoals and flats. The region's largest port is Liverpool, with a series of enclosed wet docks stretching from the original port near the city centre north to Bootle. Although the Port of Liverpool is no longer the city's main employer, it is one of the country's major deep sea container ports, and is the main port for trade with Ireland, the United States and Canada (<http://www.peelports.co.uk/port-of-liverpool>). It handles more than 33 million tons of cargo each year with a diverse range of goods. It was once one of the main ports for liners, the home to many shipping lines, and is again becoming a centre for cruise ships. Upriver from Liverpool, there are a series of ports on the Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal, including Ellesmere Port at the entrance to the Ship Canal, Eastham, Stanlow, Runcorn and Irlam (<http://www.shipcanal.co.uk/manchester-ship-canal/>), which handle containers and a range of cargoes such as coal, chemicals, oils and grain.



Maryport harbour, with the modern marina (left) within the area of the former wet dock

Liverpool and Heysham, Lancashire, are main ferry terminals, with boats to Ireland and the Isle of Man. Heysham also handles a diverse range of general cargoes, linking to a dockside railway terminal, and it also services the offshore gas industry of Morecambe Bay (<http://www.portofheysham.com>). Glasson Dock partly operates as a marina, but the port still handles cargo, mainly grain and other agricultural materials such as seed and fertiliser (<http://www.glassongrain.co.uk>).

The two largest ports in Cumbria are Barrow and Workington. Barrow was established in the 19th century by the Furness Railway Company. The modern port is dominated by BAE Systems, which has developed Ramsden Dock to handle the construction of submarines. As well as shipbuilding, Barrow still handles some cargoes, particularly, the import of wood

pulp and the export of limestone to Scandinavia (<http://www.abports.co.uk/custinfo/ports/barrow>), and it is developing the facilities to handle cruise liners. Workington has the largest tonnage of Cumbria's working ports, handling over 600,000 tons each year and is currently the subject of a major regeneration initiative (<http://www.portofworkington.co.uk>).

Other Cumbrian ports, such as Whitehaven, Harrington and Maryport, now largely service the leisure sailing industry and harbour facilities have been adapted as marinas. Maryport also has a small fishing fleet (<http://www.maryportmarina.com>). The region's most northerly port is at Silloth, which was developed to serve Carlisle. It primarily handles dry bulk goods, particularly grain which is discharged directly into Carr's Flour Mill which stands on the dockside. Molasses and woodpulp cargoes are also imported through Silloth (<http://www.abports.co.uk/custinfo/ports/silloth>).



Clarence graving docks, Liverpool. Part of the sequence of enclosed wet docks built by Jesse Hartley in 1848. Victoria Tower, in the background, stood at the entrance to the docks, and was used as a landmark

Historical Processes; Components, Features And Variability

The only known haven along this coastline, prior to the medieval period, is the beach trading site at Meols, which was in use throughout the first millennium BC (Hodgson and Brennan 2006, 57). Meols continued as a centre for trading throughout the early medieval period and into the later Middle Ages. Finds from the site dating to the 11th and 12th centuries imply regular long-distance contacts around the Irish Sea and beyond (R.M. Newman 2006, 110-111).

From the 14th century through to the later 16th century Chester was the only legal port for north-west England, with a jurisdiction from the Dee to the Solway (Woodward 1996). Carlisle became the head port for the Cumberland coast in 1564-5 (Robinson 2008), and in 1680-1 Lancaster was made the head port for north Lancashire. Liverpool had been a haven from the medieval period with a small fleet of vessels trading with the Continent and Ireland,

but with a focus on the Irish Sea trade and coastal traffic to other havens in this region (Kermode *et al* 2006, 84-5). Its rise to prominence came after the Restoration in the late 17th century, even though in 1680 it was still legally a member port of Chester (Kermode *et al* 2006, 107). All the places within these areas that were officially recognised for landing goods were known as creeks and came under the jurisdiction of the head ports. Eventually some of these places, like Whitehaven, became recognised as ports in their own right and housed chief customs officers. Until recently, a port remained something that covered a territory rather than a specific place or haven, so the port of Lancaster for example has at various times had havens serving the town of Lancaster at Lancaster city, Sunderland Point, Glasson Dock, Morecambe and Heysham, all of which have archaeological remains associated with port facilities. Even a small port like Milnthorpe had various landing places including at Arnside and Sandside.

The havens of north Lancashire and Cumbria came to prominence in the 18th century as a result of the growth of the Irish Sea trade and the Atlantic trade (Williamson 2002). Further south, Liverpool, soon gained pre-eminence in the region as the trade with the West Indies opened up (Kermode *et al* 2006). Both Lancaster and Whitehaven were briefly important slaving ports and the impact of trade with the Americas and the Caribbean led to the establishment of tobacco warehouses and sugarhouses to store and process imports and delftware potteries for export goods (Woodward 1996, 63). In the 19th century their relevance increasingly related to the industries that used them for importing raw materials and exporting products, of which some of the most notable were the iron rails produced in and exported from Barrow.

Between the 16th and 19th centuries the main landing places were at Liverpool Preston, Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancaster, Milnthorpe, Greenodd, Ulverston, Barrow, Ravenglass, Whitehaven, Parton, Harrington, Workington, Maryport and at various places along the Solway serving the city of Carlisle. Chester continued as a port, even developing a transatlantic trade, but because of the silting of the River Dee, its port facilities moved up-river to Neston and Parkgate (Woodward 1996, 63-4), and it was eventually eclipsed by Liverpool. In addition there were other minor landing places that never developed a large trade or many facilities, yet nevertheless were significant enough to feature minor ship-building industries and have ships registered to them as at Lytham, Freckleton, Millom, Allonby and Flimby. Most of the existing archaeological evidence relates to facilities and infrastructure built from the 18th century onwards. The quality of these remains ranges from abandoned quays and jetties to reused harbours and converted port buildings, to still commercially viable havens.

Merchant's Quay, Workington, may be the earliest surviving substantial harbour structure built in the area. Its natural facilities were first improved after 1563 with the creation of an artificial haven which still provides the town with a marina for small boats (pers. comm. R. Newman). Substantial investment in enhancing natural havens did not take place until the 17th century, however, with the construction of the Old Quay at Whitehaven begun in 1634 (Davies-Shiel and Marshall 1969, 195, 264). Over the next century the building of a series of piers and quays led to the development of enclosed harbours at Whitehaven and by the 19th century, as today, Whitehaven had the most complex system of pier harbours in England. Other enclosed harbours were built nearby at Maryport and Harrington from the later 18th century onwards.

In most cases single piers, moles or jetties were the first stage in the development of port facilities. Glasson developed as Lancaster's dock at the mouth of the Lune following statutory permission for the building of a mole in 1738, though it was not built until 1780-82.

Glasson replaced St Georges Quay and Sunderland Point as the main landing stage for the port of Lancaster in the later 18th century, following the opening of Lancaster's first wet dock in 1787. The evolved version of this is still in operation making it the oldest existing tidal dock in England.

Liverpool's earliest wet dock was created at the mouth of the Pool between 1710 and 1715, and was England's first commercial enclosed wet dock (Ashmore 1969, 224). Both this dock, and the later 18th century George's Dock were later infilled and the sites redeveloped, the latter becoming the site for the building of the Three Graces at the beginning of the 20th century. Liverpool's enclosed wet dock system grew enormously from the first half of the 19th century, as Liverpool developed as a global trading centre. The dock system developed by Jesse Hartley, with his 'Cyclopean' granite construction, revolutionised dock design, allowing docks to be built deeper and with almost vertical walls. His docks, and the 1821 Prince's Dock, were wholly enclosed by a wall for security, and contained bonded warehouses with rail sidings linked to the goods stations of the main railways (Ashmore 1969, 225-6). The docks were also served by the Overhead Railway, known as 'The Dockers' Umbrella', which was built in the early 1890s on a steel viaduct against the dock wall, and which became a tourist attraction for the views it afforded.



The gates to Jesse Hartley's Nelson Dock, Liverpool, built in his distinctive 'cyclopean' granite style

Apart from Liverpool, wet docks in the region are generally neither early nor especially common because of the relative success of the pier harbours. In Cumbria the first wet dock opened at Workington in 1760. The earliest wet docks at other Cumbrian ports were constructed in the 1860s. Silloth was opened in 1859 (Davies-Shiel and Marshall 1969, 259), the small Lonsdale Dock at opened in 1865 (Davies-Shiel and Marshall 1969, 196) and Elizabeth Dock at Maryport in 1857 (Davies-Shiel and Marshall 1969, 252). In 1867 the Devonshire Dock opened at Barrow, an event soon credited with beginning the history of the

town of Barrow. By the end of the 19th century Barrow had the largest and most complex system of docks in the area (Davies-Shiel and Marshall 1969, 197-8).

Dock development was facilitated by the development, first, of the canal system, and then the railway network. Glasson, for example was further enhanced when it was linked to the Lancaster Canal by a spur in 1824, with a canal basin linked to the wet dock by a sea lock. Around the same time canals were built at Ulverston and from Carlisle to Port Carlisle to facilitate improvements to maritime trade. The latter was replaced by a railway which led to the development of Carlisle's most recent out-port at Silloth. It was the development of the railways that provided the impetus for the improvement to the navigation of the Ribble and led to the construction of docks at Preston (Ashmore 1969, 217-20). Although Preston had been a haven from at least the 14th century, the character of the river meant that shipping was extremely limited in size and dependent on the tide to reach the town. Creeks had developed at Freckleton and Lytham, further down-river, to take vessels that could not reach Preston, and in the early 1840s a new dock had been built at Lytham (Ashmore 1969, 219). It was not until the 1880s, however, that a dock was built in Preston itself. Fleetwood is an example of a completely new town founded as a port with railway connections in the mid-19th century. Its founder, Sir Peter Hesketh-Fleetwood, planned it as a port and fashionable resort at the mouth of the Wyre. It was connected to Preston, and thus the rest of Lancashire, by rail (Ashmore 1969, 215). It was laid out as a classically planned town and, although money ran out before the whole scheme was complete, the port was a success and attracted considerable trade. Passenger ferry services to Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man developed, and Fleetwood became an important fish port.

One of the most important developments in the region came at the end of the 19th century with the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal, which allowed large vessels to bypass the port facilities at Liverpool, and the fees charged by the port, to access the centre of Manchester and Salford. The canal and the docks at its eastern terminus were completed in 1893, and in that year Manchester was declared a port for customs purposes. A few months later, in 1894, the Manchester Ship Canal was officially opened (Wood 2005, 68). The Manchester Docks soon became the third port in the country, in terms of traffic, comprising the four enclosed Pomona Docks and the four Main Docks (Ashmore 1982, 135). The docks in Salford have now closed and the docksides have been the subject of an extensive regeneration programme.

One of the main surviving features of many of the docks in this region are the associated warehouses, both within and adjacent to the docks complexes. At Sunderland Point, the original 18th century port of Lancaster for example, two warehouses of around 1715 survive, though they have long been converted to domestic accommodation. In Lancaster itself, one of the main features of the 1750 St George's Quay (Williamson 2002) are the bespoke port buildings flanking the road which ran the length of the quay. As well as a customs house, now used as the city's maritime museum, a series of three to five-storied warehouses were built. They share a similar design with central loading doors on all floors and a timber or metal derrick usually situated above the upper storeys. Some of them were for tobacco and thus pose challenges to conversion, as the tobacco warehouse had very limited height between floors in order to reduce the fire risk. Similar specialist warehouses were built in Whitehaven. Elsewhere, as at Ulverston, the warehouses were less specialised and usually smaller. At Milnthorpe the warehouses scattered throughout the settlement are barely distinguishable from barns. It is at Liverpool, however, where the greatest number of warehouses survive, both within dock complexes, such as those at Albert Dock, and in an extensive district that stretches alongside the docks to the north of the city centre (Giles and Hawkins 2004).

The encouragement of industry was essential to the impetus to invest in port facilities throughout the area, but especially in the havens of the Cumberland coalfield. The havens of Whitehaven, Parton, Maryport and Harrington were essentially the estate ports of respectively the Lowther, Fletcher, Senhouse and Curwen families. They established them above all to facilitate the development of their coal works. The physical evidence for this is most impressive at Whitehaven, where the links between local pits and the harbour are still visible. The development of port facilities, often tied to town development led to the growth of maritime industries such as ship building, but also those linked to export like delFTWARE potteries in Lancaster and ironworks in Barrow, Whitehaven, Harrington, Workington and Maryport. The most striking example of the link between industry and port development is probably that of the Manchester and east Lancashire cotton industry and the building of the Manchester Ship Canal its associated dock facilities.



Warehouse converted to residential use at Waterloo Docks, Liverpool

Values And Perceptions

Ports and docks could be perceived by visitors and locals in different, and even contradictory, ways. This is because they can be perceived as highly competitive commercial entities, commercial centres, or recreational places of historic importance such as Albert Dock (Liverpool). They can also be seen as places of dereliction, reminiscent of Britain's industrial past, and ripe for regeneration and redevelopment. Many of the structures associated with working docks are seen as being of poor quality or ephemeral and are thus vulnerable to demolition, even where the docks play an important role in the character and history of a town such as Liverpool.

Ports and docks can be perceived as areas that allowed the connection of distant regions, places and people. However, they can bring to mind aspects that can be seen as more controversial in history such as the slave trade and smuggling.

Research, Amenity And Education

Until very recently little archaeological work had been undertaken in relation to any of the region's port facilities, with the exception of the excavation of an 18th century gun battery at

Whitehaven. The recent redevelopment of Liverpool city centre, known as 'Liverpool One', however, provided the opportunity to excavate the site of the early 18th century Old Dock. The remains of the dock have been preserved beneath the Liverpool One development and have been made accessible to the public.

In the past decade warehouses have been subject to thematic identification surveys in Manchester, Liverpool and Ulverston, and to detailed building surveys, as at Lancaster. Industrial sites associated with the ports have been excavated as with the 18th century delftware pottery at Lancaster and the 19th century steam-powered corn mill at Barrow. The development of associated planned towns has been analysed as at Whitehaven and Harrington. Whilst the concept of an industrial archaeology of docks and harbours has evolved nationally, and classification systems developed for the features that comprise them, very little has been done to record or analyse them in north Lancashire and Cumbria. Virtually no work has been undertaken on the social archaeology of these havens, on port workers' housing, welfare facilities, or harbour churches. The military defences installed around the ports, especially during the Second World War remain poorly recorded. Above all only the sketchiest of records have been made of the archaeological remains of those anchorages and landing places that were not developed into 19th century harbours and docks. In some instances the sites of such places may not yet have been recognised at all.

Condition And Forces For Change

The historic fabric of all the havens is under pressure from development and from coastal and riverine erosion. Some development, most notably in Barrow, has exposed the remains of port-related sites and facilities that often were still standing until the last decades of the 20th century. In these circumstances development provides an opportunity to investigate these sites. Elsewhere conversion and refurbishment is providing a future for port-related buildings and an opportunity for recording. A number of Lancaster's warehouses have been converted along the mid-18th century St Georges Quay. Whilst they have been altered substantially with regard to their internal arrangements, the retention of their external appearance ensures that the historic maritime character of the quayside has been sustained. In Liverpool, 19th-century warehouses have been converted to accommodation around the historic docks built by Jesse Hartley, whilst around Albert Dock the conversions house the Merseyside Maritime Museum and Tate Modern. Elsewhere, particularly at Stanley Dock, new uses have yet to be found for the historic warehouse buildings. Here conversion of the massive tobacco warehouses involves overcoming the problem of their large size and very low ceiling heights.

At Whitehaven scores of port-related important civic, commercial and domestic Georgian buildings have been renovated. Although the initial uses of some of these changed long ago, recent renovation has been inspired and funded through conservation-led refurbishment rather than commercial adaptive reuse. Whitehaven's rejuvenation has included the reinvention of the harbour as a form of public open space. No longer used by commercial shipping, aside from the odd vessel, it is a location for festivals, an exhibition arena for public art, a recreation area and a home to a marina.

Aside from development the main force for change in relation to port facilities is the erosive force of the sea and the rivers upon which many of the ports developed. These have always been a factor in the development of ports, with the destruction of the quay at Parton twice in the 18th century leading to its abandonment as a haven. One of the most dramatic recent examples of this was the impact of the November 2009 floods along the River Derwent which had a substantial impact on the port of Workington. Here, Merchants, which may have late 16th century origins, was severely damaged and parts remain in danger of collapse. More

significant for the future, however, may be the impact of rising sea levels on the very survival of the settlement at Sunderland Point.



Whitehaven harbour, once an important coal-exporting port with links to Ireland and America, it is now used largely for leisure craft

Rarity And Vulnerability

The industrial archaeology of ports has left a significant legacy along England's Irish Sea coastline, and has had a major influence on shaping the current character of settlements, but it has as yet only been sporadically investigated and is still poorly recorded and understood. The resource is under threat from decline in the importance of these port facilities, neglect, from adaptive reuse and from the erosive forces of the sea and estuaries. These forces have always hampered efforts to improve the safety of ship anchorages and the effectiveness of goods landing and transshipment, and ultimately provided the initial impetus for the development of port facilities.

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