

Broad Character: Recreation

Character Type: Recreation

Irish Sea Regional Perspective

Introduction: Defining/Distinguishing Attributes

Tourism is an important source of income and employment for England's long Irish Sea coastline, with its sandy beaches and many long-established seaside resorts. The resorts were particularly significant for providing holidays and entertainment to the working population of the industrial towns of the north of England in the 19th and 20th centuries. The most famous of these resorts, and one of the earliest, is Blackpool, which attracted visitors from the mid-18th century, with the fashionable rise in popularity of sea-bathing (Lancashire County Council and Egerton Lea Consultancy Ltd. 2005a, 21). As the industrial towns grew, and the population expanded, Blackpool developed to cater for the working-classes, with attractions such as Blackpool Tower and ballroom, the Winter Gardens, piers and Pleasure Beach. Other seaside resorts also developed along this coast from Hoylake on the Wirral in the south to Silloth, Cumbria in the north. The greatest concentration of seaside resorts was in Lancashire; beyond Blackpool these included Southport, Lytham St Annes, Morecambe and Grange-over-Sands. Even coastal towns and villages, which were not designed primarily as resorts, often have some recreation facilities such as holiday parks where visitors can access beaches.



Morecambe beach, looking toward the west end which was at the heart of the resort with the Midland Hotel and a series of now demolished seaside entertainments including pleasure piers and the Super Swimming Stadium



Promenade shelter, Blackpool

This Irish Sea coastline is known for its expanses of sandy beaches, often backed by shingle foreshores, particularly in Lancashire, as well as the large tidal range at resorts such as Southport and Morecambe, which makes sea-bathing difficult at low tide, but which provides large areas for leisure pursuits such as sun-bathing, games, strolling and donkey rides. Many of the resorts built bathing facilities, in the form of lidos, or open-air swimming pools, although most are now defunct or have been demolished. The resorts usually also have promenades, running along the beach fronts and specifically designed for strolling and public walks. Such promenades are often associated with good coastal views and commonly form part of the planned complex of facilities typical of a coastal

resort. At Blackpool, Cleveleys, Morecambe and Lytham St Annes, amongst others, the promenades are mostly hard-landscaped, and provide access not only to the beach but also to other seaside entertainments such as piers and public gardens. Many also have shelters which are often of historical interest in their own right. The promenade shelters of Blackpool and Morecambe, for example are Listed at Grade II. Blackpool's promenade also carries the tracks for one of this coast's best-known resort features, the tram, which runs from Lytham St Annes in the south to Fleetwood in the north, linking all the resorts of the Fylde coast. Outside the resort centres, promenades tend to become less formal, and often continue as simple paved or tarmacked paths along the sea front, often with wide grass verges, as at Morecambe, Fleetwood and Lytham.

There are, or have been, pleasure piers in the larger resorts of the Irish Sea coast. Blackpool has three piers, all still in operation, whilst Southport and St Annes each has one. The expense of maintaining piers and their vulnerability to fire means that a number of British piers have been lost, and along this coast alone five pleasure piers have gone: at Morecambe, Fleetwood, Lytham and New Brighton. Fleetwood's pier suffered years of financial problems and was in great disrepair before it was finally destroyed by fire in 2008 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/sep/09/pierfire>). Morecambe had two piers by the end of the 19th century, but West End Pier was destroyed by fire in 1915 (<http://www.morecambe.co.uk/gallery/archive.html>), whilst the Central Pier burnt down in 1992 (<http://www.piers.org.uk/pierpages>). The piers at Lytham and New Brighton both fell into disrepair and were demolished in 1960 and 1977, respectively (<http://www.piers.org.uk/pierpages>).

Pleasure piers were a focus for seaside entertainment. At their simplest they would provide space for promenading, taking the air and for leisure fishing. As they developed, other facilities were provided, such as cafes, theatres, amusement arcades, aquariums and menageries, amongst others (Williams 2006, 66). Entertainment facilities such as amusement arcades are often spread along the sea front of many resorts, as at the Golden Mile in Blackpool, and are mixed in with other sea front features such as cafes and boarding houses. Some entertainment facilities, however, are large enough to have a major effect on their

area's character in their own right. These tend to be entertainment complexes such as the Winter Gardens in Blackpool and Morecambe, or amusement parks such as the Pleasure Beach in Blackpool and Pleasureland in Southport.

Seaside parks and gardens are often associated with the sea fronts and promenades, offering green space for entertainment and relaxation. The sea front park at Crosby, for example, has a marine lake and coastal path leading to the beach. Fairhaven, between Lytham and St Annes, also has a marine lake in gardens set amongst the sand dunes, whilst in St Annes itself the promenade includes an area of formal gardens. In the region's most northerly seaside town, Silloth, the Green is a large expanse of public green space between the town and the sea front. The Green is a landscaped area of former dunes, with some ornamental tree planting and limited entertainment facilities. The resorts also offer more formal gardens set back from the front, as at Lytham, Fleetwood and Morecambe, and Blackpool also has the extensive Stanley Park and Blackpool Zoo, an area of entertainment established further inland.

Sailing is a popular leisure pursuit in the waters off this coast, with a number of sailing clubs on the Wirral and on the coastline between Liverpool and Southport. Further north, former ports and havens have been adapted for use as marinas, including the small former port of Wardleys on the Ribble Estuary where a sailing club has been established. Although Glasson still operates as a commercial port, the former canal basin has found a new use as a marina. Likewise, the former ports of Harrington and Maryport have found an adaptive reuse as marinas. The harbour at Whitehaven, too, is now largely used for leisure sailing.

There are numerous holiday parks along this Irish Sea coastline, many in the form of fairly small caravan and camping sites on farms which have diversified, some of which provide permanent infrastructure and facilities for visitors. Generally closer to the resorts on the Lancashire coast are larger parks, providing static caravans and lodges as well as pitches for touring caravans, usually with a greater range of facilities. Cumbria has a number of rural commercial holiday parks, mostly around Morecambe Bay, but also around the Duddon at Haverigg, at St Bees and at Silloth.

Aside from the seaside resorts and holiday centres, the other main recreation type along this Irish Sea coast is the golf course, particularly golf links. This coastline is home to a number of important courses, which help to attract visitors to the region. Clubs such as the Royal Liverpool and the Royal Lytham St Annes, for example, have played host on several occasions to the British Open. Seaside golf courses are concentrated in the southern half of the region, in the Wirral and in Merseyside and Lancashire. There are fewer coastal golf courses in Cumbria, and where they have been established they are generally links courses in areas where sand dunes dominate, for example around Silloth in the north and on Walney Island, off Barrow. The main exception is the course near Grange-over-Sands, which was established on an area of drained and enclosed salt marsh and wetland. This course regularly floods during periods of high rainfall and high tides.

Some stretches of the extensive rural coastline have a recreational character. For example large parts of the coast between Whitehaven and St Bees in Cumbria are managed for nature conservation and their historic features, and are used as recreational open ground, with public access to areas of former industry. This includes National Trust-managed land at the former Barrowmouth gypsum mine and the former coal mines of Wellington Pit, Duke Pit and Saltom Pit, where open access has been provided for coastal cliffs walks, appreciation of the maritime and coastal landscape and the presentation of historic features. Some mining features have been retained such as the Wellington Pit chimney and the Duke Pit fan house and the Saltom Pit winding house. Part of this area includes Haig Pit which now operates as a

museum and tourist attraction. In north Lancashire, Heysham Head is also managed by the National Trust as open recreation land, and includes the remains of the early medieval St Patrick's Chapel.

There is open public access to large areas of national and local nature reserves along this coast, and wildlife watching is a popular recreational pursuit. St Bees Head, south of Whitehaven, has this coast's only Heritage Coast designation, and it is popular for wildlife watching, particularly sea birds, but also cetaceans. Other popular wildlife watching sites in Cumbria and north Lancashire include the local nature reserve on the former ironworks site at Millom, Cumbria, the former sand and gravel quarry on South Walney which is also a local nature reserve, and Trowbarrow Quarry. The sand dunes at Ainsdale, between Southport and Formby, are important nature reserves, and parts are designated as either local or national nature reserves. They are important for their dune habitats, which has one of the remaining strongholds of the Natterjack Toad, as well as red squirrels in the pine woodlands, sand lizards, great-crested newts, a variety of orchids and wildflowers (<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/designatedareas>). It is seen and managed as an area where the public can have close access to nature, and as such there are several miles of footpaths and paths accessible to cycles, pushchairs and wheelchairs.

Historical Processes; Components, Features And Variability

The seaside resorts of England's Irish Sea coast are seen as a product of the industrial age, developed as a response to the need to entertain the working population of east Lancashire, Manchester and the West Riding of Yorkshire. Each seaside resort had its own distinctive character, and was intended to appeal to a slightly different audience. Blackpool attracted the working classes, especially the mill workers, of east Lancashire and Manchester, whilst Morecambe appealed to the mill workers of West Yorkshire. Southport projected a more refined air, with its extensive public gardens and flower displays, and Lytham and St Annes focussed on attracting the middle classes. Grange-over-Sands, too, attracted the better-off, as it required a slightly longer and more expensive train journey, and offered the appeal of rural and seaside strolls and the health-giving seaside air.

The roots of seaside entertainment, however, lie in the 18th century (Parry 1983, 7). Blackpool was the first resort to develop along this coast. An unplanned straggle of around 30 cottages, spread along a mile of coastline, were the only accommodation for visitors from the early 1700s, and it was only in the later 18th century that the first hotel was built (Parry 1983, 16-17). Early visitors went to Blackpool for the health benefits of sea-bathing, but it was the introduction of the railways that provided the impetus for Blackpool to develop facilities to entertain the growing populations of industrial workers from south east Lancashire (Lancashire County Council and Egerton Lea Consultancy Ltd 2005a, 23). Blackpool's promenade developed in the late 18th century as a wide grassy bank, but because of sea erosion it replaced by a granite bulwark in 1870, and by 1905 it had been rebuilt, strengthened and extended to serve as both a promenade and sea defence. The promenade was not only extended along the coast, but also out beyond the high tide line, taking in 22 acres of new land behind the sea wall Lancashire County Council and Egerton Lea Consultancy Ltd 2005a, 28-9). One of Blackpool's best known promenade attractions is the 'Illuminations', put on in the autumn to extend the holiday season. They began in 1911 but during the First World War and then up to 1927, they were held only intermittently. Following another break in the Second World War they have been held annually from 1949.

The first investment in new amusements was the North Pier, in 1863, which soon had a pavilion and concert hall. This was followed by the South Pier (later Central Pier) in 1868 and the Victoria Pier in 1893, both designed to house a variety of amusements. In the later

19th century, Blackpool developed leisure complexes including gardens, parks, shopping arcades, ballrooms and theatres, the most famous of which are the Winter Gardens, built in the 1870s, and the Tower, which opened in 1894 (Lancashire County Council and Egerton Lea Consultancy Ltd 2005, 29). At South Shore, the Pleasure Beach fairground was developed. Amongst its famous rides, it still includes one of the earliest; a steam-powered flying machine, built by Hiram Maxim, the inventor of the first manually portable machine gun (Lancashire County Council and Egerton Lea Consultancy Ltd 2005a, 30).

Southport is also a resort which had its origins in the 18th century, and which attracted sea-bathers to its gently sloping sandy beach. It attracted miners and their families from the Wigan coalfield, and with the opening of the railway, holiday makers from Liverpool. The promenade was built in the 1830s for the purposes of strolling and sea defences. The sands built up, however, and the sea retreated some distance, and by the 1880s, the promenade was so far from the high water mark that it was proposed to build a coastal railway between the two (Parry 1983, 27-8). A pier was built in 1860, but had to be extended to reach a deep water channel to allow steamers to call in at Southport. The final length of the pier was 1,500 yards but by 1923 the sea had retreated so far, steamers could no longer tie up to offer pleasure trips to Blackpool, the Isle of Man or Barrow. The retreat of the sea, however, allowed the town to develop gardens, including botanic gardens in 1875 (Parry 1983, 29). Other attractions included Winter Gardens, a funfair, a large marine lake and a sea-bathing lake, though it was most well-known for its gardens and flower show, its open-air cafes and band concerts in the Lord Street gardens (Parry 1983, 31).

The third main resort on this Irish Sea coastline is Morecambe, which was proposed for development from the mid-19th century and reached its heyday in the early years of the 20th



St Annes pier

century, particularly in the 1930s (Lancashire County Council and Egerton Lea Consultancy Ltd 2005b). Morecambe owed its initial growth to the railways, particularly as the North Western Railway established a harbour for coastal trade and passenger traffic (Lancashire County Council and Egerton Lea Consultancy Ltd 2005b, 14). The resort grew at the same time and various attractions were built during the later 19th century, including the Central Pier with an exotic, Indian-influenced pavilion, and the West End Pier. There was both a Winter and Summer Gardens complex, which opened in 1878, the former including accommodation, a theatre and swimming baths. The town also had theatres and at least one music hall by the end of the 19th century. Around the turn of the 19th century, there were plans to build a tower to rival Blackpool's, but it was never completed although the Tower Pavilion at its base provided another venue for shows and spectacle. The promenade developed over a lengthy period and its northern end was not completed until 1897 (Lancashire County Council and Egerton Lea Consultancy Ltd 2005b, 15-16). One of Morecambe's most notable facilities was the Super Swimming Stadium built next to the promenade in the centre of town in 1938. The stadium was massive and could seat audiences of 6,000 for the aqua shows and beauty pageants that were held there regularly. It was renowned as the place where beauty parades were pioneered and it hosted the regional heat of the Miss Great Britain contest (Quick 1962, 107).

A number of other resort facilities grew up around this coastline, including Hoylake and New Brighton on the Wirral, and Crosby and Formby between Liverpool and Southport. The greatest concentration of resorts, however, was on the Fylde coast, both to the north and south of Blackpool, which itself spread so that almost the entire coastline of the Fylde catered to day trippers and holiday makers. Most had a promenade for strolling along the sea front, as well as public gardens. Some also had piers and amusements. The development of the resorts was enabled mostly by the development of the railway system which allowed workers from the industrial towns of Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire to reach the seaside within a day (Parry 1983). In Cumbria, the Furness Railway provided access to the northern shores of Morecambe Bay, where the small resort of Grange-over-Sands grew up in the late 19th and early 20th century. Grange was considered to be genteel, and was marketed as a health resort, where visitors could take the air along the sea front promenade, in the ornamental grounds behind the sea front, or take walks or drives in the neighbouring low fells (Furness Railway Company 1900, 61-75). A number of large hotels were built to cater for holiday makers, each with extensive and often wooded grounds. Grange also had an open-air lido, built in the 1930s. The lido was closed in the 1990s and stands disused at the present time.

This coastline has also attracted large numbers of visitors through the provision of golf courses, particularly following the growth of the railways in the 19th century (<http://www.golfeurope.com/almanac/history/>). There are a number of courses which were established in the 19th century, including the Furness Golf Club (1872), West Lancashire the oldest surviving club in Lancashire (1873), Formby (1884), Wallasey (1891) and Leasowe (1891). The Royal Liverpool Golf Club, at Hoylake, is the second oldest seaside course in England. It was founded as a nine-hole in 1869, on what was then the racecourse of the Liverpool Hunt Club, and extended to 18 holes in 1871, the year in which it was granted its Royal designation (<http://www.royal-liverpool-golf.com>). It hosted the first Amateur Championship in 1885; the first international match between England and Scotland, later the Home Internationals, in 1902; and the first international match between Great Britain and the United States of America, now The Walker Cup, in 1921 (<http://www.royal-liverpool-golf.com>). Lytham St Annes is also a long-established centre for golf, where the first club was the Royal Lytham St Anne's Golf Course founded in 1886. It moved to its present

location in 1897 and the original site was taken over by the St Annes Old Links Club in 1901 (<http://www.stannesoldlinks.com>). The Royal Lytham St Annes is one of England's most important course, having hosted ten British Open Championships and two Ryder Cups. It also hosted the first Ladies Amateur Championship in 1883 (<http://www.royallytham.org>). The third club with a royal designation is the Royal Birkdale, founded in 1889 and which moved to its present site in 1894 (<http://www.royalbirkdale.com>). It received the Royal designation in 1951, and the club has hosted the Walker Cup, the Ryder Cup twice and the British Open Championship nine times. It has also hosted the Women's Open Championship five times.

The 20th century has seen the development of the heritage industry. Along England's Irish Sea coastline, sites such as St Patrick's Chapel, Heysham, and the Roman Baths at Ravenglass, as well as areas of former mining south of Whitehaven are freely accessible to the public, and increasingly being used to promote tourism as well as increasing awareness about our common heritage. There is also one 'Heritage Coast' on this coastline, a designation initiated in 1972 to highlight the special scenic and environmental value of some stretches of coastline when development proposals are under consideration.

Values And Perceptions

Coastal recreation and water related activities have a number of positive outcomes, including health benefits, greater social inclusion, cohesion and quality of life, environmental protection and economic benefits (Church 2008). Many recreational activities such as swimming, rowing, canoeing, dinghy sailing and other activities that require sustained physical exertion are considered highly beneficial to achieve a healthy lifestyle. Greater social inclusion and cohesion may be fostered through travel and recreation as a means of developing new social networks, acquiring knowledge and skills and gaining a sense of achievement whilst having fun. This coastline fronting the Irish Sea offers many of these activities, often at a casual level, particularly in the more rural parts of the region, and the presence of resort towns, the Lake District National Park, the Arnside Silverdale AONB and the Solway Coast AONB attracts many people to the coastline who enjoy walking and other outdoor activities both within the resorts as well as in the more rural stretches of coast.

This area has a long history of offering coastal recreation, particularly to the working classes of the industrial towns of Lancashire and West Yorkshire. It can be claimed that Blackpool invented mass tourism, with Southport and Morecambe as serious rivals to the resort (Lancashire County Council and Egerton Lea Consultancy Ltd 2005, 30). Golf, too, has played an important role in the area's coastal recreation, attracting visitors on an international scale, both as participants and spectators, and there are stretches of coastline in the Wirral and south of Blackpool where the dominant character is one of links golf courses, often with fine views through dunes and out to sea, surrounded by middle-class seaside homes, boarding houses and large hotels to cater for the golfing visitor.

Research, Amenity And Education

Recreation and tourism have had a profound impact on economy, infrastructure and social structure of England since the late 18th century, and this can be said to be particularly true of England's Irish Sea coastline. Further research of this Character Type could focus on a better understanding of the contributions of the tourist industry, past and present, to local coastal distinctiveness. The importance and impact of Blackpool, for example, to the provision of entertainment and recreation is reflected in the town's bid to become a World Heritage Site. Its bid is based on the town remaining true to its core values as a working class holiday resort, and the retention of many of the features that make up the resort, such as the Tower,

the piers, the trams and the Winter Gardens. Blackpool and the other key resort towns along this coast have much to offer on understanding the development of the seaside resort, its architecture and the nature of the entertainments offered (<http://blackpoolaloud.org.uk>).

Much recreation itself is essentially about various forms of human enjoyment of landscape and seascape as an amenity, whether simply perceived or artificially packaged and presented by public or private providers.

Condition And Forces For Change

Coastal recreation plays increasingly strong and varied roles in the coastal and seascape perceptions both of tourists and coastal communities. Today, tourism is one of England's most important industries, even though cheaper and more attractive climatic conditions offered by easily available package holidays to the Mediterranean and beyond have put economic pressure on many seaside towns, although many of them are finding ways to regenerate, reinvent and re-launch themselves. Blackpool, for example, is looking at ways of developing its tourist offer, whilst retaining all the characteristics that define it as a resort (<http://blackpoolaloud.org.uk>). Amongst the recent changes has been a rebuilding of the promenade, partly as an improvement to sea defences, but also offering more tourism facilities and open spaces for a variety of entertainment uses. This is taking place in conjunction with a complete refurbishment of the Tower which will also offer improved access and additional attractions (<http://blackpoolaloud.org.uk>). Cleveleys, too, has recently undergone a complete rebuild of its promenade, again to improve the sea defences but also adding public entertainment spaces, with a design based on natural features including waves, open vistas and curves (<http://www.cleveleys-seawall.co.uk>).



Public art on the promenade and stone jetty at Morecambe. Installed as part of a regeneration scheme, the artworks, including a stature of Eric Morecambe, attract visitors to the town in their own right

The UK Government has previously treated it as a national priority to promote sport and recreation as a means of improving people's health and quality of life. This has combined with the economic drivers for promoting the tourist industry in recent years in raising the profile of England's coastal recreation. Part of that has been a demand for better access to the coast itself, to which the 'England's Coastal Access' provisions are a response in the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. Cumbria was one of the pilot areas put forward for the development of a coastal access trail (http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/regions/north_west).

There is a national priority to promote sport and recreation as a means of improving people's quality of life. The promotion of coastal recreation, sports in particular, and the active promotion of the tourist industry in recent years have originated a need for access to the coast. The recreation and tourism industries require an infrastructure to be in place to enable their access and success, such as roads, footpaths, car parks and hotels. The development of these infrastructures and the activities of tourists, for example, can impact on historic landscape and seascape in two ways: 1) a positive way by having tools in place to increase public awareness, respect and enjoyment; 2) a negative way through the physical removal or disturbance of sites (Fulford *et al* 1997: 188).

Rarity And Vulnerability

In character terms, recreational use has long been a major formative aspect along much of England's coastline. Refurbishment and updating inevitably put pressure on earlier features but this is part of the ongoing change present and necessary everywhere. It needs to be managed and with knowledge and sensitivity regarding those aspects from the past that lend distinctiveness to places or which are judged by society (at many levels) to be rare or otherwise special. The latter may or may not be formally designated, but planning constraints on development initiatives in coastal areas also exert some control on the locations and forms of proposed recreation complexes.

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