

# 1.1 BROAD CHARACTER: NAVIGATION

## 1.1.2 CHARACTER TYPE: NAVIGATION ACTIVITY

### REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE: EAST ANGLIA

#### INTRODUCTION: DEFINING/DISTINGUISHING ATTRIBUTES

Navigation activity plays an important role in the region's life and economy, reflecting the presence of a series of large and significant ports. In the north of the region this includes Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft and in the south, Harwich and Felixstowe, as well as the northern approach to the Thames Estuary. In addition a number of small harbours exist along the coast which are now extensively used by smaller craft including Southwold, Orford and Walton.

Great Yarmouth now combines the established river port with a large deep water outer harbour which opened in February 2010. At present the main activity in and out of the port is connected with the energy industry but commercial interests are increasing. Lowestoft remains an important fishing base for the region despite the downturn in the fishing industry. Also of importance in the region is the large area under the jurisdiction of the Great Yarmouth Port Operations. Both ports have their own harbour pools and administrative areas including small craft facilities, pilot boarding areas and an unrestricted anchorage between Cockle Bay and Scratby.

However the majority of navigation activity takes place in the vicinity of Harwich, the landscape of which forms the finest natural harbour between the Humber and the Thames, and is located at the confluence of the Stour and Orwell estuaries. Here both Harwich and Felixstowe possess international ports. Harwich International Port is one of the UK's leading multi-purpose freight and passenger ports handling freight and passenger traffic to and from Scandinavia and the Low Countries (<http://www.harwich.co.uk>). The Port of Felixstowe is the largest container port in the UK and one of the largest in Europe.

As such the traffic using this area is continuous and dense. A recent survey commissioned by the Marine and Coastguard Agency (MCA) showed that over a period of 28 days 1443 merchant vessels, 193 ferries, and 101 tankers transited Harwich Haven, either entering or departing the port, or passing through on other routes (MCA/Safetec 2002).

Harwich Harbour occupies an area of c 6 km<sup>2</sup> and is controlled by a wider agency known as Harwich Harbour Authority (HHA), the jurisdiction of which covers the ports of Felixstowe and Ipswich and has far reaching impacts into the offshore area. This is particularly notable in the area around 'the Sunk' which acts as a crossroads for shipping with constant streams of commercial traffic. The area contains a large precautionary area, a series of anchorages for both deep water vessels and smaller craft, pilot boarding areas and traffic separation schemes. A series of two way deep water routes and recommended routes steer vessels in and out of the haven and the Thames Estuary.

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Traffic from Felixstowe travels extensively to Holland, Belgium and Germany as well as further afield to the Middle East, and nationally, to Teeside. Established ferry routes run from Harwich to Ejsberg in Denmark and to Holland. In addition traffic transits the area from northern ports such as Edinburgh and the Humber. Shipping follows the coastal route around the whole East Anglian coastline and includes vessels such as cargo and bulk ships, ferries, gas carriers and tankers.



*Shipping route from Lowestoft Ness*

On a smaller scale numerous small craft facilities and anchorages are based on the major rivers and estuaries in the region, which are themselves important navigation routes. These include the Stour, Orwell, Deben, Walton Backwaters, the Alde/Ore and the Blyth as well as the Broads complex. Leisure sailing is particularly important around the areas of the Broads, Walton Backwaters and the Alde/Ore.

Many of these smaller waterways were once dependent on ferry crossings, however most are now defunct. Notable exceptions to this include the ferry across the Blyth between Southwold and Walberswick which is the oldest surviving rowed ferry in the eastern counties (Edwards 1991, 103). In addition a chain ferry runs across the River Yare at Reedham in Norfolk, the only river crossing between Norwich and Great Yarmouth.

### **HISTORICAL PROCESSES; COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND VARIABILITY**

This region has been a hub of navigation activity for millennia. Further afield boat remains are known to date from the Mesolithic (eg the Pesse logboat in the Netherlands)

and numerous examples in Denmark). In this region a logboat was discovered in Walton in 1936 in a similar area to Neolithic finds. No remains of the boat survives but it is possible that this represented use of the coastline at an early date (Sturt et al 2009, 46).

Evidence for long distance trade between England and the continent dates back to at least the Bronze Age and Bronze Age boat remains have been discovered in Dover (Clark 2004) and the Humber to the north (Wright 1990). However so far no certain prehistoric boat remains have been found in East Anglia.

The earliest confirmed evidence of navigation in the region dates to the Roman period as illustrated by the presence of shore forts at Walton (now lost), Burgh Castle and Caister. It is likely that ports existed at Felixstowe as evidenced by a possible Roman approach road (Good and Plouviez 2007, 69) and Dunwich, which would have been located at the mouth of a large estuary. In addition 13 amphorae were recently found in a garden in Aldeburgh which appear to have been a deliberate deposit of traded containers (ibid, 54). River travel would also have been important and the discovery of a series of complete Roman pots in the water at Iken on the River Alde may have represented a possible shipwreck or quay dating to this period (ibid).

Following the withdrawal of the Roman military East Anglia was settled by Germanic peoples crossing from the Continent. East Anglia became an important maritime focus during the Anglo-Saxon period with a major port at Ipswich and numerous beach landing places all along the coastline. The rivers would again have been crucial during this period for inland navigation.

Evidence for Anglo-Saxon navigation comprises a number of boat remains. Coastally this includes a logboat found off the coast at Covehithe dated to the Middle Saxon period (AD 775-892). **This may have been eroded** from one of the Broads in the area but its origin is unknown.

Perhaps the most famous evidence of Anglo-Saxon navigational activity is the ship burial from Sutton Hoo on the River Deben. The ghost of the clinker-built ship was found in a burial mound dating to the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Although no body remained the individual had clearly been placed in a specially made burial chamber within the ship, surrounded by a wealth of high status goods including a ceremonial helmet, shield and sword. There has been a suggestion that this was the burial of King Raedwald, ruler of East Anglia at this time. The burial was located just above the River Deben and the mound and those surrounding it were visible from the estuary. It is likely that the ship would have been dragged up to the burial place from the river. A similar boat burial thought to have been of 6<sup>th</sup> century date was also found at Snape on the River Alde.

Continuing contacts with the European mainland are indicated by the numerous Viking finds in East Anglia, with much of the area under Danish rule in the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries. **A piece of a large vessel dating to the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries** was found on Easton Bavents beach, possibly from an offshore sandbank.

By the medieval period East Anglian ports had begun to enjoy a degree of eminence (Malster 1969, 3). This was partly due to the cloth industry which grew up in the region, enjoying its heyday in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries (see processing industry). The ports were used to export both wool from the region but also from further afield from the Midlands.

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The region's ports traded across Europe from France to the Baltic and the Mediterranean in return for timber and furs, French wines and luxury goods (Wren 1976, 19). **The ports** were also important to the fishing industry at this time, with hundreds of vessels fishing the local waters as well as undertaking long distance journeys to Iceland (see fishing).

Again rivers were significant routes with Ipswich situated at the heart of the great wool producing area at the head of the Orwell (Wren 1976, 132). Norwich exchanged huge amounts of imports and exports via Great Yarmouth along the River Yare. Manningtree, located on the southern bank of the Stour, was significant as a port from the early 13th century when it appears to have been deliberately planted as such. Smaller centres existed at Snape on the River Alde, Mistley on the Stour, Pin Mill on the south bank of the Orwell and Blythburgh on the Blyth.

This period of extensive activity came to an end from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards due to a series of **political, economic and natural disasters including silting up of harbours** and the Black Death. International navigation routes were effectively closed as a result of continental wars for much of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and the increased threat of piracy. In addition the chief focus of the cloth industry moved to northern England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the fishing industry went into decline due to Dutch competition.

Overall ports and trade networks in the region became increasingly localised and coastal routes came to the fore. Smaller river ports such as Slaughden and Walton remained busy exporting agricultural produce, malt, bricks and fertiliser. Imports were dominated by coal from northern England following these coastal routes.

The emergence of the railways from the mid 1800s saw a further changes in navigational usage. New routes developed including packet routes to London and paddle steamers for passengers, although these routes remained coastal.

WWI and WWII put an end to much of this activity due to the dangers of going to sea. However sea trade in the region has continually soared since the end of WWII (Wren 1976, 148) leading to the rise of the haven ports and navigation routes we see today.



*Felixstowe from Walton backwaters showing the range of traffic*

## **VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS**

Navigation activity has always been important to the East Anglian region economy and coastal character. For centuries communities have made their living from their proximity to the North Sea and its connecting routes, linking East Anglia to other parts of Britain and to the continent. Navigation activities are deeply ingrained in the psyche of the local communities.

On a smaller scale the once ubiquitous ferries across the rivers and estuaries linked local settlements. This is illustrated by the remaining ferries such as the Reedham chain ferry which was once the only connection between Great Yarmouth and Norwich and the ferry across the Blyth from Southwold to Walberswick which is still managed and maintained for the fishing industry.



*Blyth ferry*

### **RESEARCH, AMENITY AND EDUCATION**

There have been a number of studies into navigation routes as maritime archaeology has established itself as a discipline. One such was the 'England's Shipping' project funded by the ALSF and undertaken by Wessex Archaeology (2007). This project used GIS to map shipping movements recorded in historical archives, creating a resource central to the understanding of this Character Type during the historical period and the development of present patterns of navigation.

The scale and variety of navigation activities in the region's economy and human geography make them valuable for a range of educational purposes. Many aspects of this Character Type are already represented in many of the region's local museums.

Significantly some of the older forms of activity such as the ferries discussed above continue to function as a valued local amenity and also as tourist attractions.

### **CONDITION AND FORCES FOR CHANGE**

Navigation activity in this region is currently booming for a number of reasons. Offshore industry is currently very active in this region, including aggregates dredging and construction and maintenance of energy installations. In addition the existing ports are expanding with increasing demand, including the addition of an outer harbour at Great Yarmouth, the Felixstowe South expansion and Bathside Bay developments, as well as the London Gateway project to the south.

A recent survey commissioned by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) identified part of the area as a zone of concern in terms of volume of traffic and room for emergency manoeuvring (MCA/Safetec 2002). The convergence of a number of shipping routes, in addition to the presence of vessels boarding or landing pilots and vessels anchored in the Sunk deepwater anchorage was problematic (ibid). Contributing to this problem are the restrictions on navigation of military practice areas and from the increasing effects of wind farms. As such, new traffic routing measures have been put in place.

### **RARITY AND VULNERABILITY**

Navigation activity in the region is, and always has been, constantly changing and reflects varying levels of trade and wider economic activity, both in the region and nationally. As highlighted by the 'Demonstrating the Method' HSC project (Seazone and Maritime Archaeology Ltd 2009), wrecks can also provide an indication of past routes and activities. This is illustrated by the large numbers of recorded wrecks adjacent to the coastline and clustering around large ports and harbours throughout England. This clearly relates to the successful coastal trade of the post medieval period and possibly earlier.

The region does contain some rare forms of navigation activity, including (as discussed above) its rowed and chain ferries.