

1.6 BROAD CHARACTER: COMMUNICATIONS

1.6.1 CHARACTER TYPE: TRANSPORT

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE: EAST ANGLIA

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING/DISTINGUISHING ATTRIBUTES

Transport clearly plays a vital role in the economy and everyday life of the region. The road network is a vital form of communication for local people, as well as bringing tourists and other forms of economic benefit. However road access can be poor along the coastline and is not particularly well developed across much of East Anglia. Poor road access has limited development in some areas, most notably along the Suffolk coast (Countryside Agency 1999, 60) which has therefore retained its reclusive character. There are few roads in the broads area, these cling to the valley sides, linking settlements on the valley edges and are very rare in the marshy valleys (Countryside Agency 1999, 48). The sense of isolation created by the less well developed parts of the road network is, however, valued by some, as contributing to the areas local distinctiveness. Some important works of civil engineering have, however, been constructed in the region and these are exemplified by the Orwell Bridge, built in 1982, which was one of the largest concrete structures in Europe at the time of its construction and marks the boundary between Ipswich and parkland on the banks of the Orwell (Countryside Agency 1999, 58).

Relative lack of industrialisation since the industrial revolution has meant that the canal network was relatively under developed. However, canals were built during the late 18th and 19th centuries and as well as forming an important part of the local economy some of them formed inspiration for local artists. The railways are relatively well developed considering the rural character of the region, extending out to coastal towns such as Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft, with smaller lines running to settlements such as Sheringham in North Norfolk. These have served to bring goods and trade into the region, and also stimulated the tourist economy during the 19th centuries, particularly in the coastal towns, some of which developed significant tourist trades. The region's railway network suffered disruption with the closure of the branch lines in the 1960s, but has since been revitalised, with a renewed role in transporting goods, and increased passenger numbers.

The region was largely bereft of airfields until the Second World War, however, extensive airfield construction during the conflict left a legacy of airfields and related structures, some of which went on to form the basis for civilian airports in the later half of the 20th century. A good example of this being Norwich international airport, which plays an important role in bringing trade and tourism into the region.

HISTORICAL PROCESSES; COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND VARIABILITY

The predominant means of transport in this region has, historically, been water based, land transport has also been important, particularly for the movement of certain commodities such as livestock, which are easier to move by land (Williamson 2006, 27). Roman military roads, such as the Pye Road cut across the natural topography of the region (ibid.), with Roman settlement in the area being linked by a network of smaller roads and tracks (ibid. 41

East Anglia did not experience the degree of intensive canal building during the 18th century, that characterised other areas of the country such as the midlands and the north (ibid., 75). However, several rivers were improved, in order to facilitate the sending of ships deeper inland. The Waveney was made navigable between Beccles and Bungay in the late 17th century (ibid.). Subsequent improvements included the Stour as far as Sudbury in the early 18th century, and during the course of the 18th century the Little Ouse, the Nar, and the Blyth were also improved (ibid.). The Gipping and the Chelmer were improved in the late 18th century. Some canal construction was carried out, however; improvements to the Broadland River system, included the creation of the New Cut between Reedham and Haddiscoe in the 1830s. Also the construction of the North Walsham and Dilham Canal in the 1820s extended the navigable section of the Ant for 8 km to the north (ibid.) Some of these features were painted by contemporary artists, for example, the painting of Flatford Mill by John Constable (ibid.)

The first railway constructed in the region was the London to Cambridge line, built in 1825. Almost all of the major East Anglian towns were on railway lines by the 1850s (ibid., 76). The opening up of the landscape that this encouraged had a profound effect on the region, with changes to the economy and landscape accompanying the development of the railways (ibid.). These changes included more intensive production of livestock, and the expansion of potato cultivation in the fens, both of which could now be moved to market more easily (ibid.) Railways also led to urban expansion and stimulated the coastal holiday industry and that of the Norfolk Broads (ibid.). By the 1960s much of the railway network had gone out of use as the result of branch-line closures, however a resurgence in rail travel and freight in the later 20th century ensured the railways continued use.

The expansion of trade and increased agricultural production from the late 17th century encouraged investment in transport infrastructure, in many cases roads were improved through the establishment of turnpike trusts, with toll houses and inns being erected to accommodate travelers (ibid. 73). In the 18th and 19th centuries the proliferation of these improved turnpike roads transformed patterns of movement in the region, which was now less directly related to the local topography and the configuration of drainage basins (ibid. 27). This process began the breakdown of regional distinctiveness (ibid.).

Much of the coast was generally farmland and small hamlets next to the sea until the 20th century when seaside recreation became popular. Much of the land was then purchased by wealthy individuals who planned to create coastal resorts, aided by the construction of railways. It can be argued that Clacton, Walton and Frinton owe their existence entirely to the railways (ibid., 125).

Air transport made little impression on the East Anglian landscape until the Second World War (Williamson 2006, 77). In the mid 1930s there were only four air bases in the region, but by the end of the war there were 107. These features took up large amounts of space and had a significant impact on the landscape, including the destruction of woods and hedgerows (ibid.) Norwich airfield is now a civilian airport (ibid.).

Felixstowe was home during the early part of the 20th century to the Seaplane Experimental Station, which was responsible for designing seaplanes and flying boats. In 1924 design work was discontinued and the station was renamed the Marine Aircraft Experimental Establishment, relocating to Helensburgh in Scotland during the Second World War.

VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS

The sense of isolation and remoteness engendered by the relatively poor coastal road network is valued by some local communities and some tourists.

The impact of railways and to some extent roads has enabled the development of coastal tourist resorts in the region, which are valued as a cultural resource and have been the background for works of art and literature which has played a role in defining English identity and the relationship of English people with the rural landscape.

RESEARCH, AMENITY AND EDUCATION

The transport links, including road, rail, and airports (and to a limited extent canals) have obvious utility for the local population and are vital to trade and industry. They also serve to bring tourism into the area.

An overall study into the role of railways in bringing tourism and industry to the coast would be beneficial.

Transport hubs and heritage resources such as transport museums can play an important role in aspects of education such as geography and history.

CONDITION AND FORCES FOR CHANGE

Development pressure within the study area, along with the continued importance of road, rail and air travel for the local economy will continue to transform these elements of this character type.

RARITY AND VULNERABILITY

Steam trains are still running in North Norfolk. Many railway branchlines went out of use in the 1950s and are now vulnerable to neglect and natural processes such as erosion. Canals although fairly common may be subject to neglect, or infilling by natural processes if not kept up through economic activity, or charitable/government grants. Early roads may be at risk from erosion and agriculture.

PUBLISHED SOURCES

Countryside Agency, 1999 *Countryside character volume 6: East of England: the character of England's natural landscape*. The Countryside Agency, Northampton

Williamson, T, 2006 *England's Landscape: East Anglia*. English Heritage, London.