

1.8 BROAD CHARACTER: SETTLEMENT

1.8.1 CHARACTER TYPE: SETTLEMENT

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE: EAST ANGLIA

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING/DISTINGUISHING ATTRIBUTES

The coastal settlement of the East Anglian region is one of varying character, combining traditional fishing villages such as Felixstowe Ferry, tranquil rural retreats like Orford, bustling tourist destinations (Great Yarmouth, Clacton) and the industrial centres of Harwich and Felixstowe.

The majority of the settlement within the region is significant for recreation and tourism in a number of ways. Distinct areas of the coastline are dominated by large coastal resorts including Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft on the Norfolk/Suffolk border and Walton/Clacton/Jaywick in Essex. The towns of Clacton and Great Yarmouth in particular are renowned for being holiday destinations, traditionally for Londoners. Characteristic features of the towns include the piers, seafront gardens, amusements, watersports and annual air shows.



Great Yarmouth – the traditional seaside resort

More non-commercial coastal settlements include towns and villages such as Southwold, Walberswick, Aldeburgh, Orford and Frinton and those along the North Norfolk coast, which are considered to be more 'upmarket', offering traditional fishing beaches, beach huts and coastal walks. For example, in direct contrast to neighbouring Clacton, Frinton is

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perceived as being very conservative, known for its interesting Victorian and art deco buildings with no traditional seaside activities and no public house until 2000. Aldeburgh, hosts an annual internationally renowned music festival.



Frinton – the conservative town

A number of less tourist-orientated settlements alongside the numerous large estuaries have acquired a character particularly attributable to their maritime location such as the towns of Manningtree and Mistley on the Stour and smaller settlements such as Pin Mill on the Orwell.

The towns of Felixstowe, Harwich and Ipswich, incorporating their respective ports on the Stour and Orwell in the south of the region, form its industrial maritime hub. Felixstowe is also based along a strip of shingle beach with recreation facilities and Harwich offers passenger travel to the continent.

With the exception of the city of Norwich which itself retains some maritime character, the main centres of population in the region remain coastal or port locations with a population of c. 130,000 in Ipswich. As a result of its location at the head of the estuary, Ipswich is the regional centre for Suffolk and has traditionally brought wealth to the region. Lowestoft, Great Yarmouth and Clacton also form significant urban areas.

HISTORICAL PROCESSES; COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND VARIABILITY

The earliest evidence of settlement in the coastal region comes from Clacton and Dovercourt which are significant early Palaeolithic sites. Mesolithic tools have been found on Dovercourt beach and in the Orwell and Stour

estuaries which would have been 'hotspots' for Mesolithic occupation, often based on rich estuarine resources (see Flemming 2002).

Neolithic and Bronze Age activity in the area from Jaywick to Harwich associated with the 'Lyonesse surface' (see Palaeolandscape) may be indicative of some specialised coastal settlements (Wilkinson and Murphy 1995, 104) and included finds of paddles. A number of ring ditches and barrow cemeteries have been located along the banks of the estuaries in the south of the region, particularly the Stour. The proximity of the waterways, their resources and possible ritual status indicate the area may have been a prime location for Prehistoric activity. The region has more 'Beaker period' settlements than any other in England (Williamson 2006, 31) including a series of roundhouses at Sutton Hoo. A late Bronze Age settlement has also been located at Gisleham in Suffolk.

Manningtree is said to be the home of the Manni tribe who greeted Julius Caesar in 55BC and an enclosed Iron Age settlement has been found in Mistley. Around the Deben valley fieldwalking indicates Iron Age settlements were scattered at intervals of c. 700 m and 1 km (Martin 1993; 1999; Williamson 2005, 11). Surviving Roman archaeology mainly comprises maritime activity including salt processing in the form of 'Red Hills' (see processing industry), coastal defences such as Burgh Castle and possible ports; the latter including Felixstowe and Ipswich. However, fieldwalking has suggested a density of 1-1.5 settlement sites per m² (Williamson 2006, 36) including some settlement of coastal marshlands. The Roman period saw the development of the first true towns including Caistor St Edmund near Norwich (ibid, 37).

The region became more important in the Anglo-Saxon period as a result of its position adjacent to the North Sea and many Saxon towns were located at or close to limits of navigation, such as Norwich and Ipswich. These functioned as entrepôts or 'wics', controlling long distance exchange and in some cases production. Control of these locations equated to political power and the development of the kingdom of East Anglia.

Small fishing villages are known to have existed all along the coast at this time including Aldeburgh (whose 16th century Moot Hall has roots in the Anglo-Saxon period), Dunwich, Great Yarmouth, Walton and Clacton. Sizewell was an Anglo-Saxon settlement meaning 'Sisa's well' (Edwards 1991, 93). An area of the coast, made up of the



Aldeburgh with the Moot Hall in the foreground

settlements of Walton, Kirby and Thorpe known as the Soken was owned by the chapter of St Pauls cathedral and granted special privileges and powers.

Anglo Saxon maritime exploitation of the area is evidenced by the remains of two fish traps located during the RCZAS in Holbrook Bay on the northern bank of the Stour estuary

(Everett 2007). Cemeteries have also been excavated around the Suffolk estuaries, often overlooking the rivers and in the cases of Snape and Sutton Hoo famously containing ships. The ship burial at Sutton Hoo which contained a number of high status burial goods including a helmet, silver bowls and spoons, a purse, shoulder clasps and golden buckle is assumed by many to be the burial place of Anglo-Saxon King Raedwald. The mound would have been visible rising above the Deben estuary, an important route inland at the time of its construction.

Ipswich (Gipeswic) was an extensive settlement by the mid 8th century and a major pottery production centre – a result of potters from the Netherlands settling here c 700. By the 10th century AD, the town had become significant; situated at the heart of the great wool producing area at the head of a sheltered and easily navigable estuary (Wren 1976, 132). Ipswich became the country's busiest port in the Anglo-Saxon era (Wheatley 1990, 59). The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that the town was sacked in 991 and 1000AD and heavy fines levied on the inhabitants (Wren 1976, 132).

Harwich also began to gain significance at this time, offering the only safe anchorage between the Thames and the Humber. The first reference to Harwich was in the Anglo-Saxon chronicles, which record a battle fought between King Alfred and the Danes in 885. The name Harwich comes from 'here wic', or wic of the army, indicating a settlement probably existed in the Saxon period. Blythburgh and Rendlesham were also important Saxon centres, the latter described by Bede as a royal vill.

As a result of its position on the North Sea, Viking, and in particular Danish, influence extended beyond the military as the region became part of the Danelaw in the 9th century. A few Scandinavian place names remain, especially around Great Yarmouth eg Hemsby, Scratby, Herringby and the term 'beck' after the Old Danish 'bekr' is still used to describe a stream in Norfolk. Numerous finds of Scandinavian metalwork from the 9th to 11th century suggest extensive settlement. It is possible that Danish settlement may have provided the impetus for the development of Norwich which still possesses many Scandinavian street names and churches dedicated to Scandinavian saints such as St Olave (Margeson 1997, 27).

East Anglia as a whole remained populous and economically prosperous in the medieval period (Williamson 2006, 11). North east Norfolk and coastal Suffolk possessed particularly fertile soil and carried abnormally large populations in the early medieval period (ibid, 23). In 1066 Norwich was the third largest city in England after London and York and was a major port trading with Scandinavia and the Rhineland until eclipsed by Great Yarmouth (Williamson 2006, 108-109).

The Domesday Book of 1086 records a number of thriving coastal settlements making a living from the North Sea, including Felixstowe, Dunwich, Dovercourt and Southwold. Dunwich was said to have 3000 inhabitants, eight parish churches and two market places in the medieval period, forming the largest town in East Anglia. Extensive finds scatters at nearby Covehithe also confirm the substantial size and status of the settlement in the Medieval period (Good and Plouviez 2007).

Harwich obtained real significance in the 13th Century when the town was developed as an economic venture by Roger Bigod, fourth Earl of Norfolk, in direct competition with the port of Ipswich. The town received its charter in 1238 and was granted

a weekly market in 1253. By the 14th century Harwich had become an assembly point for ships summoned by the king in times of war and by the 15th century had a flourishing ship-building industry (<http://www.harwich.net/histbrf.htm>).

Similarly Manningtree on the southern bank of the Stour was significant as a port from the early 13th century and received its market charter in 1238. The town also appears to have been deliberately planted as a port, presumably by the lord of the manor (Essex County Council 1999). The twin town of Mistley was a settlement trading in timber, fish and salt in 1070, it decayed in the 14th century due to the rise of Manningtree (Wren 1976).

A number of these thriving settlements were all but destroyed by a series of catastrophic events and processes during the medieval period including storms, harbour siltation, the Black Death and political and economic changes. Most of Dunwich and parts of Covehithe and Aldeburgh were lost to the sea by the 15th century.

Overall the Industrial Revolution passed East Anglia by, partly due to the lack of water power needed to power factories (Williamson 2006, 17). However, some coastal and estuarine settlement retained its good fortune or found significance in the post medieval period. The zenith of maritime Ipswich was c 1500 when the port was known as the shipyard of London (Wren 1976, 134). At one time the shipyards extended six miles downstream to Pin Mill (ibid). Trading centres and hards also existed along the length of the Orwell estuary. By 1800 Ipswich harbour was almost choked with silt (Wheatley 1990, 69). Added to the increasing dominance of Great Yarmouth, Ipswich increasingly became non-maritime (Wren 1976, 141).

Woodbridge was known for building merchant ships and men of war for the navy from 1500 to 1850 (Wren 1976, 189) and area enjoyed coastal and continental trade until the railway opened in the 19th century. Further down the Deben estuary Waldringfield was an industrial centre for coprolite in the 1700s (see extraction industry).

During the 16th and 17th centuries Harwich gained significance as a town as a result of successive wars with France, Spain and Holland. A naval dockyard was constructed and Henry VIII based his navy in Harwich. Cod fishing and the coal trade also became prominent and Harwich mariners led expeditions to Jamestown and New England including Christopher Jones who captained the Mayflower in 1620. Elizabeth I was said to have commented that Harwich was a “pretty little town and wants nothing” (Wheatley 1990, 57). Maritime links include tales of Nelson and Lady Hamilton who were said to frequent the Three Cups public house (Hay and Hay 1972). White’s directory of Essex records that 3829 souls lived in Harwich in 1841.

Settlements such as Southwold and Walberswick remained thriving fishing and trading ports until trade was killed by the First World War and ultimately the harbours silted up. The prosperity of the region, particularly relating to the wool and cloth trade (see processing industry) is shown by its soaring perpendicular churches (Williamson 2006) such as that at Blythburgh.

Manningtree became very prosperous in the 16th century, as evidenced by its surviving built environment; the majority of its wealth came from the cloth trade and its docks. Manningtree was also a major centre of the Essex malt trade in the 19th century. Today many Georgian facades in the town conceal a number of Tudor houses,

weavers cottages and coaching inns. As a result the small market town contains elements of both a sea port and industrial town (Essex County Council 1999).

Farming has moulded the region's landscape over several centuries (Williamson 2006, 20) and much coastal settlement remained as farmland and small hamlets next to the sea until the 19th and 20th centuries when seaside recreation became popular. Large swathes of land were then purchased by wealthy individuals to create coastal resorts, aided by the construction of railways to previously inaccessible areas. This began as early as the 1780s when Mistley was re-developed as a potential spa town by Richard Rigby. The Mistley Towers remain as a monument to this development, all that now remain of a once grand church.



View of Mistley Towers

It has been argued that Clacton, Walton and Frinton owe their existence entirely to the railways (Williamson 2006, 125). The land in this area was bought by railway entrepreneur Peter Bruff in the 1860s, creating the resorts by the 1880s. Walton pier was built at this time to accommodate steam ships from London and Ipswich. Felixstowe developed a flourishing tourist industry during the late 19th century, facilitated by the opening of the railway station in 1877. It became particularly fashionable following a visit by the German royal family. Additionally smaller settlements such as Southwold were converted into well-to-do seaside resorts, fed by the introduction of the railway in 1879. The introduction of the railways further boosted these settlements by providing building materials for dock construction, as well as freight and passengers to encourage trade.

Some of the more unusual settlements in the region include Thorpeness and Jaywick. The former is effectively an Edwardian folly (Moore and Bamber 1995, 239); a large tidal delta in 1908, Glencairn Stuart Ogilvie dammed the sea entrance creating the

present day meare, around which a Mock Tudor holiday village was constructed. Jaywick was constructed as a holiday resort for Londoners in 1928 by Frank Stedman. The houses were often poorly constructed and intended for short term holiday use. However, many people moved in and stayed, the result of which is that the resort still stands and contains some of the poorest housing in Europe (www.jaywick.net). It is the subject of ongoing regeneration plans, with proposals to demolish some areas.



Thorpeness – the Edwardian folly

The seaside heyday was cut short by World War Two and tourism never returned in such a large volume, further affected in recent years by the popularity of foreign holidays. In contrast some settlements continued to thrive as ports, most notably Harwich and Felixstowe which soared after World War Two and are currently undergoing a period of regeneration for commercial and residential needs.

VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS

The majority of settlements in the East Anglian coastal region are known for their small size and population density, their essentially rural nature and tranquillity. The exceptions to this are the larger urban and more industrial centres such as Norwich, Ipswich and Lowestoft.

For many the settlements in this region are a retreat for periods of leisure and holidays. The larger tourist centres have particular associations with Londoners whereas the smaller towns and villages have acquired upmarket reputations, often attracting the wealthy.

The settlements are often still intimately associated with the sea and maritime activities. These include the declining fishing industry, as

well as other offshore industries and activities such as the association between Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft with offshore energy.

RESEARCH, AMENITY AND EDUCATION

Settlements are extremely important landscape features in this region, often demonstrating considerable time-depth and significantly contributing to the perceived character. Many of East Anglia's coastal settlements have varied histories which are often under-researched, although this is changing with the advent of town character assessments and similar projects. There is potential for considerable historical and archaeological research including educational projects. For example, many of the settlements discussed above have historical features and landscapes which could be used to create walks and trails.

Settlements are also key to tourism and industry in the region, bringing in considerable capital, particularly in the summer months. In some cases this depends on the retention of historic characteristics such as traditional fishing fleets, in others links to infrastructure bringing freight and passengers.

CONDITION AND FORCES FOR CHANGE

Settlements undergo constant change as populations and socio-economic factors fluctuate. Many of the East Anglian coastal settlements have however retained historic features such as town plans and architecture dating as far back as the Saxon period in the case of Ipswich. As a result of the lack of good building stone, flint buildings are ubiquitous and characteristic of the region, often with significant time depth and in good condition.

The position of East Anglia on the North Sea coast has led to significant influences on settlement from the continent throughout history. These can still be seen in landscapes such as the area surrounding Southwold and Walberswick which is rich in brick-built Dutch gables and pantiles indicative of influence from the Low Countries.

There is currently major pressure for development along this coastline. This applies to housing, particularly problematic in present day Lowestoft which has direct road and rail links to the south, in contrast to many of the smaller coastal ports (Good and Plouviez 2007, 35). In addition industrial development such as the Felixstowe South and Bathside Bay developments may herald significant changes in the settlement landscape. This may include impacts on the heritage and seaside character of the area.

RARITY AND VULNERABILITY

The character of many East Anglian settlements under coastal influence is unique to this region. Many settlements possess considerable time-depth and are intricately linked to the North Sea.

The character of the settlements is at constant risk from development and over-exploitation of the coast. However the infrastructure in the region remains patchy, allowing smaller settlements to remain rural and preserve this character. The development of the major ports may see distinct changes to the larger settlements; however there is a significant local interest in retaining character.

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