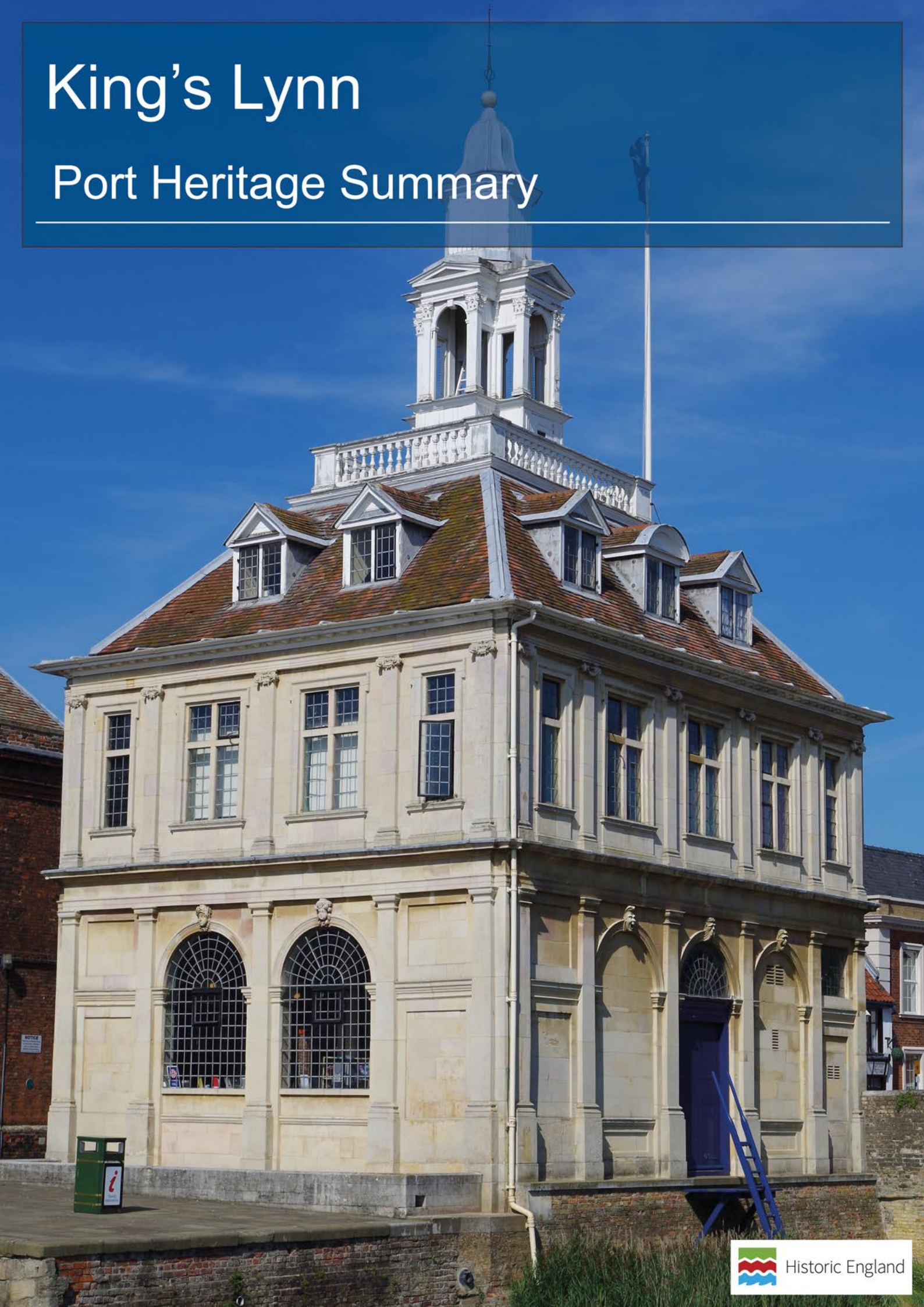


King's Lynn

Port Heritage Summary



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Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|---|
| ABP | Associated British Ports |
| c | circa |
| HE | Historic England |
| HER | Historic Environment Record (Norfolk County Council) |
| HLF | Heritage Lottery Fund |
| KLCB | King's Lynn Conservancy Board |
| LB | Listed Building |
| NGR | National Grid Reference |
| NRHE | National Record for the Historic Environment |
| NTL | Normal Tidal Limit |
| OS | Ordnance Survey |
| PDZ | Policy Development Zone (a management area included in an SMP2) |
| Ro-Ro | Roll on – Roll off |
| SM | Scheduled Monument |
| SMP2 | Shoreline Management Plan 2 |
| SSSI | Site of Special Scientific Interest |
| THI | Townscape Heritage Initiative |

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Cover illustration

The Customs House and Purfleet Quay.

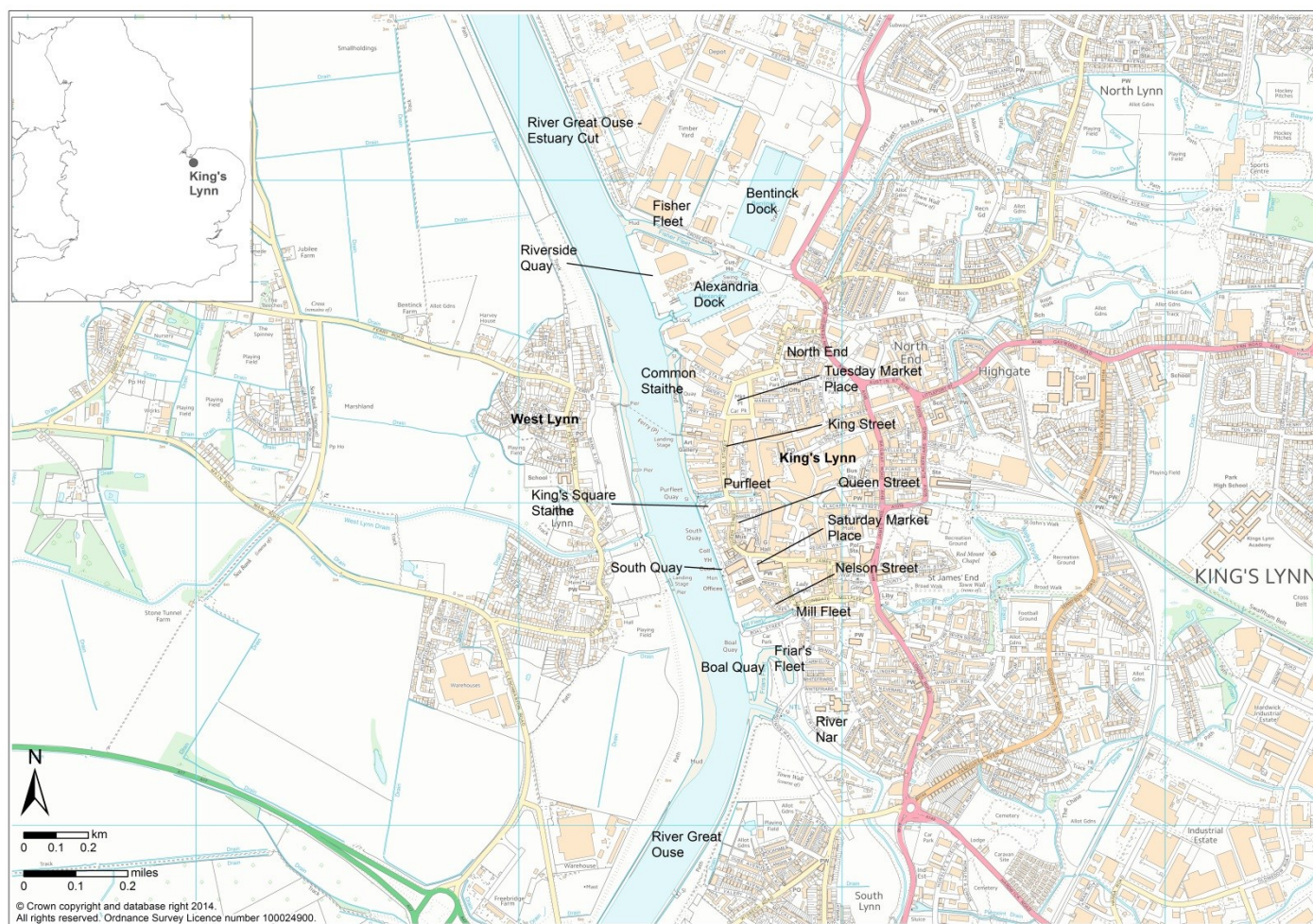


Fig 1 Location, topography, place-names and features.

Introduction

The *England's North Sea Ports* project aims to improve the understanding of the heritage values, significance, vulnerability and adaptability to change of port-related heritage in nineteen major ports along England's North Sea coast, from Berwick upon Tweed, Northumberland, to Harwich, Essex. The project focuses on the historical development of each port, its present character and its port-related heritage, the values attached to that heritage and the issues and opportunities it presents for future development.

The review for each port is presented as an illustrated 'Port Heritage Summary', designed to be succinct and readable, raising awareness and understanding amongst all parties interested in that port's future development and so contributing towards the sustainable management of its port-related heritage.

This Port Heritage Summary relates to King's Lynn in Norfolk where eight individual areas of port-related character have been identified. The Summary explains how port heritage within those areas contributes to Lynn's distinctiveness today, to the interpretation of its historical development, and that of East Anglia, The Wash and the North Sea. This includes the cultural associations and feelings of local people and communities to the maritime past and how it is viewed and valued by them today.

A range of management options to build on the present values and roles of its heritage are summarised, enabling them to serve as a positive asset in King's Lynn's future, retaining its rich cultural distinctiveness while meeting its changing economic needs.

Location

King's Lynn is located on the eastern bank of the River Great Ouse, in the south west corner of the Wash, in the area of the Fens, a large area of low lying former marshland. The Great Ouse is tidal to Denver (eleven miles upstream) where a sluice gate prevents its ingress. The river links into an extensive network of inland waterways.

The Wash is a large three-sided bay. Its eastern coast is entirely within Norfolk, and extends from a point a little north of Hunstanton in the north to the mouth of the River Great Ouse at King's Lynn in the south. The opposing coast, which is roughly parallel to the east coast, runs from Gibraltar Point to the mouth of the River Welland, is all within Lincolnshire.

The southern coast runs roughly north west-south east, connects these two river mouths and is punctuated by the mouth of the River Nene.



Fig 2 Marriott's warehouse, South Quay. Once associated with the Hanseatic steelyard, the warehouse is now a restaurant and exhibition space.

The Port

The King's Lynn Conservancy Board (KLCB) is the Statutory Port, Harbour and Pilotage Authority for King's Lynn. The Board also provides the pilotage and towage for the Port of King's Lynn.

Associated British Ports (ABP) owns and operates Alexandria and Bentinck Dock and Riverside Quay (220m of quay frontage on to the River Great Ouse between Fisher Fleet and Alexandria Dock).

Local Authorities and heritage organisations

King's Lynn comes under Norfolk County Council which oversees management of the Historic Environment Record (HER - database of historic buildings and archaeological sites and monuments) and provides heritage input and advice for archaeological mitigation within the normal planning process.

At a local level King's Lynn is covered by the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk.

The Historic England (HE) East of England office is in Cambridge. HE provides input and advice on heritage matters including the roles of the inherited cultural environment in the management of change and specific advice for Listed Buildings (LB) and Scheduled Monuments (SM), together with strategic overviews and support at local, regional and national levels.

Historical development of the port and its North Sea roles and relationships

The modern port of Lynn has its origins in the medieval period when the port was nationally important. Its success had much to do with its location in relation to the North Sea, its agricultural hinterland and the extensive network of inland water ways draining the Fens which are accessed via the port.



Fig 3 There has been a passenger ferry between West Lynn – Lynn since at least the 13th century. The modern ferry docks at West Lynn against a modern landing stage built next to a 19th century wooden pier.

In the medieval period the port generated much of the town's wealth which is reflected in the remarkable range and grandeur of its surviving historic buildings - the merchant houses, warehouses and guild complexes.

The coming of the railway and the increasing size of commercial cargo vessels in the late 19th century profoundly affected the workings of the port. As with many other ports on the North Sea coast, this led to the creation of new docks, increased portside handling facilities and substantial improvements to port navigation.

The port is still important regionally, with Alexandria and Bentinck Dock used by short sea or coasting vessels for the trade in bulk products – mainly timber, grain and fertiliser. Once redistributed inland via a complex network of waterways and, later, the rail network, goods imported into the port are now moved by road.

Lynn and Bishop's Lynn

King's Lynn is known by its inhabitants as Lynn. The *linn*- place-name element is considered to be of British origin, meaning 'pool' (Key to English place-names website).

In the early medieval period (AD 410 to AD 1066) the area of Lynn lay within the eastern part of a tidal pool with the shore found far inland to the east of the present edge of the River Great Ouse (Richards 2006).

The Late Saxon settlement was small and located between the Millfleet to the north and the River Nar to the south, in the general area of All Saints Street, probably sited next to a small tidal pool (Borough of King's Lynn and West Norfolk 2008c; Robertson *et al* 2005).

The Domesday Book of 1086 recorded that the area was used for salt production. Fenland peat was used as a cheap fuel source to evaporate off water from salt-laden sand loaded into ceramic containers or salt pans. It is possible that waste discarded from the salt workings, or salterns, raised and extended the ground surface, inevitably reclaiming more land from the river. It is also likely that the salt lagoons were enclosed by banks, some of which are still preserved

in the alignment of several roads in the town (Clarke and Carter 1977; Richards 2006).

The major development of the town began in 1100 when Herbert de Losinga, the first Bishop of Norwich, founded a new town and priory church, St Margaret's. Losinga's town was established to the north of the earlier settlement, on ground that then fringed the river, roughly between the Millfleet and the Purfleet, with a market developed at Saturday Market Place, possibly on the water's edge (Borough of King's Lynn and West Norfolk 2008a; Clarke and Carter 1977).

Losinga's town of Lynn, or Bishop's Lynn as it became known, was successful and it rapidly expanded to the north of the market place towards the Purfleet, which became the town's main harbour.

The port and town's success was in part due to its location: it sat at the head of a network of rivers that penetrated deep into the surrounding region which made water-borne trade relatively cheap and easy. Lynn became an outlet for corn, wool, hides and ale and a redistribution point for goods such as wine, fish, salt, cloth and building materials to be moved upstream. It was also used by the local monasteries as their principal commercial port (Richards 2006).

By the mid-12th century Lynn's success led to expansion of the town to the north of the Purfleet into 'neweland', the development based around a second market place, the Tuesday Market Place (Borough of King's Lynn and West Norfolk 2008b).

Contributing to Lynn's success was the reclamation and improvement of large parts of the Fens as farmland in the early 13th century. This enhanced the productivity of the monastic estates in the region which produced huge quantities of wool for export out of the port (Richards 2006).

In 1203 the Wash ports of Lynn and Boston were only surpassed in value, in terms of exports and imports, by London and Southampton. And as a major port it could contribute many ships for use in expeditions of war (*ibid*).

In the medieval period Lynn also became an important port from which pilgrims went to and from Walsingham (twenty five miles away). This was an internationally important pilgrimage site in honour of the Virgin Mary (Walsingham Wikipedia page).

Trade was in the hands of the merchants who operated from the port. Many were not only from Lynn, but also from other English towns attracted to the port due to its economic potential. Likewise merchants from Lynn also settled in foreign ports to establish and aid their trading relationships.

Merchants in the port channelled their activity through the town's five 'merchant' guilds of approximately thirty guilds found in Lynn in total. The 'St William' guild brought together those involved in trading with Scandinavia, in particular Bergen, Norway, from which timber, whetstones, fish, furs and hawks were imported (Richards 2006).

In the 14th century large amounts of cod or 'stockfish' were imported to Lynn, much of it traded

from Trondheim and then Bergen, both in Norway (Childs 2000).

Merchants, from the Baltic, the Low Countries and as far afield as Florence, came to the port to trade in timber, furs, wine and cloth and to take away corn, wool, salt and fish. The town's own merchants were also involved in the export of wool, in particular to Flanders, and in relation to Gascony, also a significant trade in wine. However, most famous of Lynn's trading relationships was that with the Hanseatic League ports in the Baltic (*ibid*).

Lynn's relationship with the Hansa merchants was a successful one and in 1271 they were granted privileges that allowed them to live outside the protection of burgesses or townsmen (unlike other foreign merchants) so that they could trade in their furs, fish, cereals, pitch, timber and beeswax. The relationship between England and the Hanse was mostly good but there were times of conflict. After the Treaty of Utrecht in 1474 England's relationship with the Hanse became more stable and they developed a 'steelyard' or complex off St Margaret's Lane in 1475.

Trade was also undertaken with Scotland and Iceland, and Lynn also had a trade with other English coastal ports, in particular with London and Newcastle.

As the town grew, commercial and domestic buildings were developed along the waterfront to infill the space between the two market places.

In the early phases of the town the eastern edge of the river broadly corresponded with the line of the present King, Queen and Nelson Streets. In the first phase of development merchants' houses faced the river (corresponding with the eastern side of the streets) but in time the river edge moved further westwards and development followed in the 15th to 16th centuries with merchants' houses and warehouses (to the rear) built to back on to the river (Borough of King's Lynn and West Norfolk 2008a; Clarke and Carter 1977; Richards 2006).

The survival of buried later medieval quay walls and wharves inland from later quays has been confirmed from archaeological excavation near to the Purfleet (Sedgeford and Baker Lane), Millfleet (Stonegate Street) and on the site of Thorseby College (Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, 2008a; Clarke and Carter 1977; Norfolk County Council HER; Unger 2008).

Records show that the ferry connection from Lynn to West Lynn has been in operation since at least the late 13th century (Worfolk nd).

The town's earliest defences utilised the natural protection that the Rivers Nar (south) and Gaywood (north) gave, the tidal pool/river edge (west) with the eastern defences reusing an earlier (possibly Late Saxon) sea wall. The eastern defences were later reinforced and partially extended with ditches, walls and banks built in the mid-12th and mid-13th centuries (Richards 2006).



Fig 4 Ferry Lane leads to the West Lynn ferry and is one of the late medieval narrow lanes that lead to a landing place on the river.

Lynn's location and success as a port was, and still is, reliant on the river remaining navigable. Before the 13th century it followed a different course, emptying into the North Sea at Wisbech (twelve miles to the west). In a sequence of engineering projects the 'Well Creek' was dug to divert the Rivers Nene and Ouse to the Wash at Lynn and at a similar time, the Ouse was re-routed to meet with the Little Ouse and River Wissey to form the Great Ouse. This, it was hoped, would increase river flow and reduce silting.

It was soon realised that the changes had created problems: the Great Ouse's size meant that it actually deposited more silt, impairing the drainage of the Fen's river system, resulting in a series of major floods affecting the town and the local low-lying areas (Richards 2006).

Records dating to the early 16th century suggest that the town had stagnated, with flooding affecting the town's water frontage. Lynn's foreign trade also faced increasing competition from London and was affected by the decline in the wool trade, which was compounded by the loss of monastic estates with the Reformation. However, late 16th century records show Lynn was still a nationally significant port with the number of Lynn-owned ships and their tonnage increasing dramatically (Richards 2006).

King's Lynn – a rich and populous town

The Reformation freed Lynn from the levies and obligations exercised by the bishops of Norwich and in 1537 the town became officially known as King's Lynn.

Property owned by the former monasteries and religious guilds was sold to individuals, often wealthy merchants. Several large monastic buildings were demolished, although the Greyfriars tower was retained by the corporation as a day mark for shipping using the port (Richards 2006). The pilgrimage site at Walsingham was also destroyed (Walsingham Wikipedia page).

The period between 1550 and 1650 was an important period of construction for the town. Many existing houses and warehouses were updated and new houses built, those for the wealthy more



Fig 5 Looking to the Customs House and Purfleet Quay from the edge of King's Staithe Square.

often with brick. Materials were often brought in through the port, with bricks brought down river from Ely and Cambridge, deal imported from Scandinavia and roof tiles from Holland (*ibid*).

By the middle of the 16th Century the riverside area was becoming so congested that five new lanes were built, all leading west from the main street to provide access to the river bank. These include Page Stair Lane, Water Lane, Ferry Street, Ferry Lane and Purfleet Quay (Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk 2008b).

In the 1580s, at Clifton House, off Queen Street, a brick-built five storey look-out tower was constructed for merchants to monitor the comings and goings of the port. It is now the last surviving example of a watch house in Lynn (Listed Building description).

In the early 16th century the Common Staithe was built as a public quay and warehouses and a new custom house were built to the west of the Tuesday Market Place. The waterfront at this time was quite different to that of today: the merchants' warehouses backed directly on to the river with private quays and landing places and watergates or openings to allow small vessels to gain covered access at high tide. The watergates were drawn in a prospect of the town dated to c 1725. Extensive cellarage for the storage of goods can be found in the properties alongside the river and market places (Richards 2006).

The new customs house was too small and after 1656 St George's guildhall was used as a supplementary customs house.

This led to the building of Lynn's famous landmark, the Customs House, next to the Purfleet Bridge in 1685. It was designed by Henry Bell, the son of a wealthy Lynn merchant and, later in life, mayor of the town. Originally the upper floor of the building was leased out to custom officials and the lower floor designed as a place for merchants to meet. In the Tuesday Market Place a new public house, the Duke Inn, was built to accommodate merchants. However, by 1717 merchants no longer used the customs house (Richards 2006).

George Vancouver, the son of a Lynn collector of custom dues on shipping, made two exploratory voyages with Captain Cook in the late 18th century, and surveyed the west coast of the North Americas, giving his name to Vancouver, Canada. A statue on Purfleet Quay celebrates his life (Richards 2006; Vancouver Wikipedia page).

The warehouse and merchants' houses continued to be updated and new ones built, although the port was not as significant as it once was. The Hanseatic steelyard complex was bought from its German owners in 1751 by Edward Everard, a local merchant, with the east wing updated into a new house (Richards 2006; Unger 2008).

Trade prospered in the 18th century; timber was imported from the Baltic, Norway and North America, corn was imported from the Baltic and locally produced corn exported to Lisbon.

Materials for ship building were also imported from the Baltic (timber, pitch, tar and hemp). Records of the 17th century show that Lynn built ships both for local demand and for merchants based in other ports. In the 18th century the yards were located at the North End, near St Ann's fort and on the Nar at South Lynn.

More waterways were cut linking Lynn to inland parts of the region and further expanding the network from which cargo could be redistributed from the port.

King's Lynn became an important garrison and ammunitions base for the Parliamentary forces in the Civil War when military cargos were sent from London by boat with redistribution via the inland waterways (Richards 2006).

While the town and port largely prospered the management of the River Ouse became more problematic. In the mid-1600s, following a series of disastrous floods, the Bedford Level Corporation employed the Dutch born Cornelius Vermuyden to improve the drainage and reclamation of the Fens. A series of new drains were cut, shortening the Ouse's length to the sea, and a sluice built at Denver to hold back the incoming tide. However, not only did the sluice make the inland movement of cargo more difficult, it also slowed the flow of the incoming tide so more silt was deposited at Lynn.

London was an important trade destination for exports from Lynn's agricultural hinterland. In the 18th century London expanded massively – and increasing quantities of corn, fish, butter, beans and hides were exported to it.

The coal trade was also important to the port, especially with the North East from the late 16th century.

Ships from Lynn went to the North East with corn and returned with coal and, likewise, vessels from the North East brought coal and returned with corn. Coal was cheaper at Lynn than other East Anglian ports and it was transported to inland markets on lighters, often pulled by horses.

The connection to the North East was an important one: it has been said that Lynn was the most important provincial port for North East coal and that the glass making industry in Tyneside relied on sand exported from Lynn as ballast. The trade in both was decimated by advances in engineering in the form of the railways and the steamship (Richards 2006; Graves and Heslop 2013).

Lynn also had considerable interest in fishing and the trade of fish. In the early 16th century the port began sending a fishing fleet to waters off Iceland, along with other East Anglian ports, but by the later 17th century fishing mostly concentrated on waters closer to home (Jones 2000; Richards 2006). The port developed a small but profitable whale fishing fleet in the late 18th century when the Government began to provide financial incentives for the expeditions. The ships would depart for the seas off Greenland every March and return in July and the homecoming of the whaling ships to the River Nar was once considered a major event (Richards 2006).

A factory next to the River Nar, next to the Friar's Fleet, boiled and processed the whale blubber and a nearby bone mill processed the bones, together with the bones of livestock slaughtered locally and those imported from Europe, for the production of fertiliser and grease.

The importance of the brewing industry had a long tradition at Lynn. Almost all the merchants' complexes on King Street had malthouses and breweries and by the late 18th century three main families dominated trade – the Bagges, Allens and Everards. The families also took a close interest in the working of the port; the Bagges having considerable interest in whale-fishing and shipbuilding (Richards 2006).

During the Napoleonic wars Lynn's trade was limited to the coastal and inland trade of corn and coal. St Ann's fort was built to defend the town, at the mouth of the Fisher Fleet on the site of an earlier defensible position erected in c 1570 for cannon.

Despite Lynn's success as a port in the 17th and early 18th centuries the effort needed to sustain the Ouse for safe navigation was burdensome. Ships had been getting bigger so increasingly small vessels or lighters were being used to unload ships. In 1772 the corporation of the town obtained an Act of Parliament to better organise towing rights, improve the reliability of pilots and establish new mooring posts (Richards 2006).

The corporation also sought the advice of several engineers to improve the navigation to the port. All those consulted recommended a re-cutting of the river channel to form a straight channel to increase the rate of flow, to help scour the Ouse and keep it open. Work began on the three mile long canal, the 'Eau Brink Cut', in 1818. It opened in 1821 and within a couple of years the faster flow helped to scour out the channel several feet deeper, although disastrously, further silt was deposited next to Lynn, much to the consternation of the merchants who in 1831 were awarded compensation.



Fig 6 Looking from West Lynn to Riverside Quay and the entrance lock to the late 19th century Alexandria Dock.

The channel out to the Wash was still too shallow and awkward so in 1853 the 'Estuary Cut' was created as a channel from the port out to the North Sea (*ibid*).

The Estuary Cut brought about a major change by creating further land for development to the north of the town. Until its creation the Ouse had cut sharply north east from Common Staithe Quay to St Ann's Fort, but, following the cut in 1853, it ran in the present, more northerly direction (Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk 2008b).

The building of the docks

In the mid-19th century ten percent of the town's population were densely packed in the town's fishing quarter, the North End. The North End's fishing community used the Fisher Fleet at the mouth of the River Nar as a landing place for their boats (Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk 2008b; Richards 2006).

The number of ships registered to Lynn had increased but the total tonnage by only a small amount, suggesting that the vessels continued to be small. Ships were sometimes co-owned in shares but many were owned by the members of the merchant dynasties, especially the brewers. By 1864 no ship builders remained at Lynn (Richards 2006).

The railway came to the town in the late 1840s and greatly affected Lynn's port activity by robbing much of its coastal and inland traffic.

To combat the decline, and to integrate the railway-based redistribution system into the workings of the port, a Dock and Railway Company was set up in 1865 to construct Alexandria Dock.

The development used part of the Fisher Fleet, greatly changing the character of the inlet and the surrounding area. It allowed steamships to berth at Lynn but the Dock was not successful until its railway connection was established in 1870. The dock was advertised as being in an ideal position to deal with trade from the Midlands, London and the northern coal fields. Alexandria Dock was a success and Bentinck Dock was quickly added, with further warehouses and railway connections built (*ibid*).



Fig 7 A short sea vessel being loaded with grain from the silo next to Bentinck Dock. In the foreground is wood chip.

In 1889 a steamer ran aground in the opening to the Estuary Cut preventing its safe navigation. The need for its removal, with the financial problems encountered to do so, provided the momentum for the setting up of the Lynn Conservancy Act of 1897. This created a board to support the safe navigation of the port and to manage the removal of wreck debris (Richards 2006).

The new docks allowed the port to support its agricultural hinterland in primary products such as corn, coal and timber. Far more corn was now being imported from North America than locally produced grain being exported from the port.

Boal Quay was also the focus for imports of the raw materials needed for the production of fertiliser including French sulphur, German potash and Moroccan phosphates. These were taken by rail to the large processing plant of the West Norfolk Chemical Company at South Lynn. Some of the fertiliser produced was then exported from Lynn to Europe (Richards 2006). Boal Quay was shown as 'Boal Wharf' on John Woods' map of 1830.

The 1887 Ordnance Survey (OS) map shows the port and town in considerable detail.

At the northern end of the town the conjoined rectangular docks of Alexandria and Bentinck Docks open to the Ouse via a single lock. At this time, the Docks were surrounded by industrial development including an ironworks, oilcake plants and a saw mill, the quaysides served by railways. To the north of the Docks the Fisher Fleet, as today, is a narrow tidal inlet with a short wharf or 'landing stage' on its northern side.

At the mouth of the Fleet, on its northern side, was the coastguard station opened in 1883. This included a terrace of cottages to provide accommodation for the crew and their families, with a separate officers' accommodation and a boathouse. It was closed in 1920s (Listing description).

The water frontage between Common Staithe Quay and the Purfleet recorded by the OS map maintained an older character with warehouses, malthouses and small foundries backing on to the river; the simple facilities served only by mooring posts. From King's Staithe to the edge of the Millfleet the South Quay had extended the water frontage further into the

river. South Quay had been built by the 1846 Map of Lynn (presumably to improve the berthing facilities at the port), making the watergates recorded in 1725 redundant. South Quay was served by a railway that crossed the Millfleet and River Nar via two swing bridges.

Between the Millfleet and the River Nar was Boal Quay and its oil mill and saw mills, the industry there was also served by the railway network.

On the side of West Lynn, sea defences are shown as isolated lengths of banks probably reflecting different phases of build. The river's edge is mostly a narrow band of salt marsh. West Lynn itself is open to the river with a series of piers on the river's edge, each noted as 'Old Pier'. Some are located next to small tidal inlets, others not. It is possible that these were built to aid mooring and to defend parts of the river bank from erosion and/or silting. At West Lynn, a small, rectangular cutting and a possible slipway suggest a ship or boat building yard (the site recorded on the 1928 OS map as a shipyard).

Gradually freight began to be moved by motor transport at the expense of the railways. In the mid-1920s the port became an oil storage base with the Anglo-American oil company, British Petroleum, and Shell Mex Ltd building depots in the area.

The 1928 OS map recorded the port as largely the same layout as that recorded on the 19th century OS map. Alexandria and Bentinck Dock were surrounded by larger-scale industrial development, in particular by saw mills.

Reports suggest that the port had begun to decline by the 1950s and in 1963 its ownership transferred to the Government-run British Transport Docks Board, which in 1983 was privatised and the docks ownership transferred to a subsidiary, Associated British Ports Ltd (Richards 2006).

New facilities at Alexandria and Bentinck Dock were developed including new cranes, quay reconstruction, Roll on–Roll off (Ro-Ro) facilities for the Washbay-Hamburg service and a container and timber terminal.

The Washbay-Hamburg service was a cargo service operating between Hamburg and King's Lynn. First started in 1952 it was in continuous service by 1953 and continued in operation until 1994 (Flags of the World website, Washbay Line web page).

In the 1980s, following the disastrous East Coast tidal surge and floods of 1978, the flood defences protecting King's Lynn and West Lynn were updated and extended. Existing flood defence banks were raised and strengthened, new surge walls built, lock gates added and the gates to the Dock updated (National Rivers Authority nd).

The Dock now handles timber products, liquid bulks, steel and other metals and dry bulk products including grain and foodstuffs, notably malting barley. Most of the grain is exported to northern Europe (ABP website).

The Fisher Fleet is still used by local fishing vessels to land their catch, mainly cockles and crab caught in

the Wash. South Quay can still be used by vessels to moor against but is not often used by commercial cargo vessels, with Boal Quay used by fishing boats.

The foot passenger ferry running to West Lynn continues today.

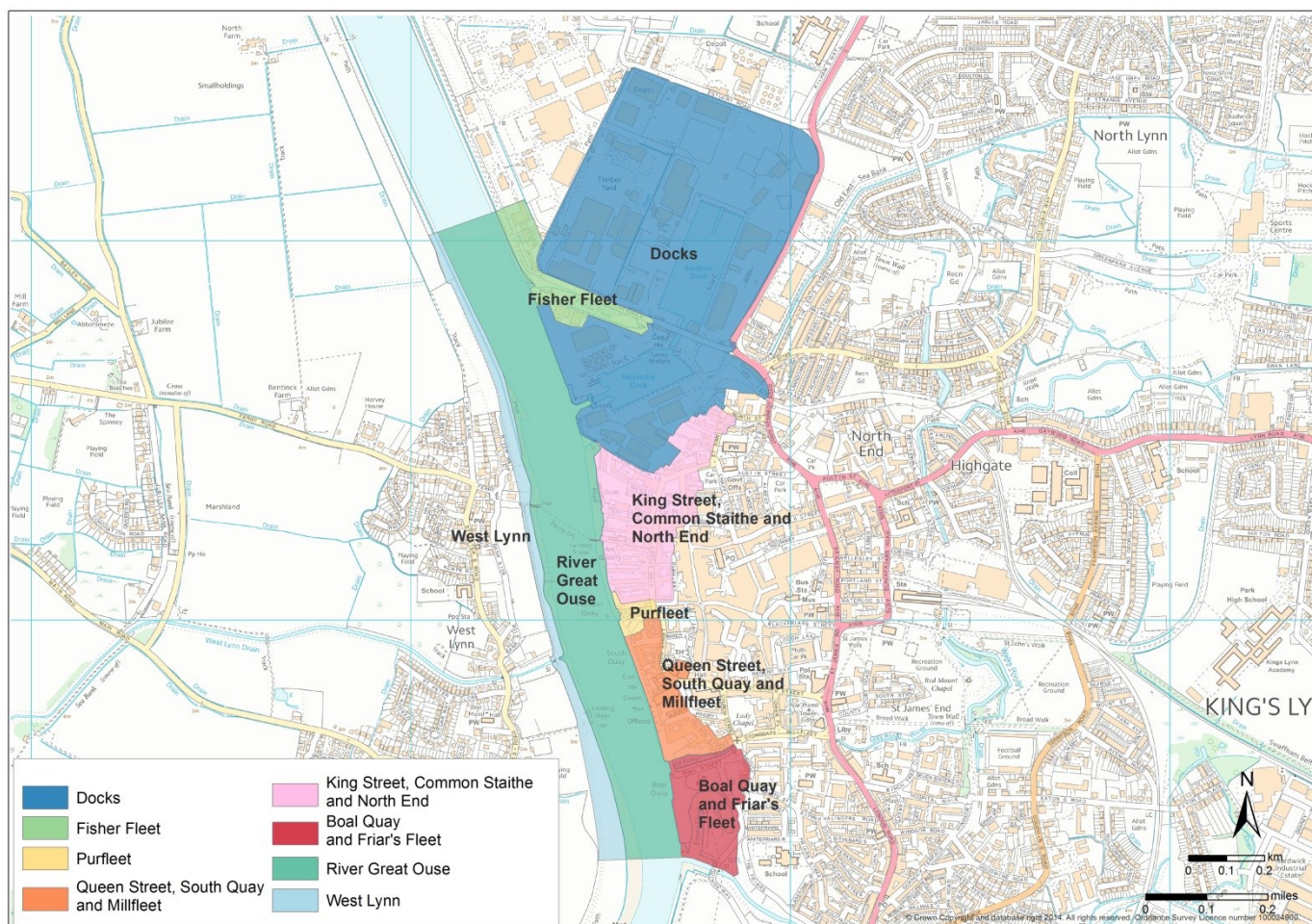


Fig 8 Character Areas.

Port-related heritage assets and contributions to present character

King's Lynn's overall port-related area has been divided into eight distinctive Character Areas (Fig 8).

The distinctive feel of these Character Areas is shaped by their historical development and influenced in the present by patterns and sometimes direct survivals from their inherited past. That heritage can be many and various – place-names, street layouts, patterns of open space, whether public or private, a sense of enclosure by closely spaced or large buildings, or the presence of readily recognisable historic buildings and features – they all provide links in the present to King's Lynn's past, even if the original structures which influenced and defined present aspects of the townscape and streetscape may have long gone and been replaced by modern features. These distinctive aspects of place add interest, texture and unique character to the port. The way in which surviving historic aspects within the port's fine-grained landscape, often called heritage assets, interact with that present character serves as a tangible reminder of the cultural origins of the port's distinctiveness. Whether or not people who live in or use King's Lynn have interest in its heritage as such, its historical development has shaped the place which is familiar to them, with which they have cultural associations and where they

undertake their recreational, industrial and commercial lives.

This section seeks to examine how the surviving port-related heritage contributes to the present character of King's Lynn.

Character Area Summary

1. River Great Ouse

The origin of King's Lynn as a port predates the River Great Ouse emptying into the North Sea here. Originally located on a broad tidal pool, the River was only redirected to King's Lynn in the early 13th century. The present alignment of the Ouse owes much of its character to later changes and adjustments to its course, the latest being in the 1850s and the construction of the 'Estuary Cut'.

The channel has the appearance of a broad canal as it runs an almost straight course past Lynn and out to the Wash; its linear path an attempt to control the silting which plagued the port in the past.

Although a substantial feat of engineering, the river channel is only wide and deep enough for the use of short sea or coaster vessels which ply a trade with mainland Europe and its inland waterways.

A good way to get a water level view of the River, and views to the town's waterfront, is to cross the Ouse via the Lynn-West Lynn ferry.

Character Area Summary

2. The Docks

The layout of King's Lynn's present commercial cargo port is a result of its late 19th century design as two conjoined wet docks accessed via a narrow lock and channel (the Bentinck passage). The docks were dug on reclaimed land following the cutting of the Estuary Cut, a reminder of the navigation problems that the port has had to overcome to ensure its survival.

To the north of the lock is the Riverside Quay, a modern quayside extension to the area of the docks.

Originally connected to the railway network, sections of rails survive in parts of the quays. The docks now rely on road haulage by lorries and the quays are often crowded by them as they wait to unload produce from the agricultural hinterland surrounding the town.

Alexandria Dock is accessed from the River Great Ouse via a narrow lock positioned at almost 120 degrees to the river channel. Its lock gates are modern, recently refitted to conform to the latest flood defence standards. The narrowness of the lock means that the dock can only be used by short sea shipping or coaster vessels.

Open storage areas, silos and warehouses for bulk storage dominate the area of Alexandria Dock. Most are modern in date except for brick-built buildings on the southern side of the dock.

In places the original brick-built quay and lock walls of each dock survive with granite coping stones, whilst in other sections the quay walls have been re-worked with concrete.

Crossing the Bentinck passage between the two docks are the original iron swing bridges built in 1883 with the construction of Bentinck Dock; one for rail transport, the other for road vehicles. The bridge on Cross Bank Road is publically accessible and gives a good vantage point to watch the movements of the ships using the docks.

Jutting out into Bentinck Dock from its northern end is a wooden jetty. Slightly weather beaten and largely unused, the feature probably dates to the mid to late 20th century.

On the western side of Bentinck Dock is a large timber yard. The Dock is an important redistribution point for Scandinavian and Baltic timber for a British chain of builders merchant. This represents a continuation of the historic trading connection the port has had with northern Europe.

The eastern side of the Dock is dominated by a large, modern white-painted grain silo flanked on either side by lower, modern warehouse buildings for the storage of bulk products.

3. Fisher Fleet

The present extent of the Fisher Fleet dates to the late 19th century and the construction of Alexandria Dock.

The Fleet is a tidal inlet still used by Lynn's fishing boats to moor up and discharge their catch for

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processing in nearby factories. The modern processing buildings are located on the southern side of the Fleet and to the north, beyond the former coastguard station buildings.

The quay wall on the southern side of the Fleet is faced by modern steel shuttering, the northern side by a modern concrete-built wharf which is linked to Cross Bank Road by a series of walkways. Fronting onto the road is a modern concrete-built sea defence wall with sea defence gates. Fishing gear is stored on the jetty.

When the fishing boats are in the Fleet it is a hive of activity, with cockles and shellfish being run by forklift out to the processing buildings.

The mouth and rear of the Fleet is a graveyard for unused wooden vessels with several hulks lying in various states of decay.

4. King Street, Common Staithe and North End

An urban part of King's Lynn, this Area includes part of the historic core of the town.

The North End, the area surrounding St Nicholas Church, was once Lynn's fishing quarter, infamous for its high density of housing and the number of families living in this small area. The character of the North End was greatly changed with the creation of Alexandria Dock in the 1860s and the slum clearances of the 1920s and 1930s. It is now a mixture of historic buildings and modern development and whilst the character and link to the workings of the port are now less apparent, they are explained in the True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum which also contains an historic smokehouse, once used to cure herring.

King Street and its fine buildings owe their origins to the workings of Lynn as a port – where the town's early wealth was largely made.

In the early development of the town the eastern edge of King Street corresponded with the river's edge. With the movement of the river westwards, built development followed from the 15th to 16th centuries in the form of merchant houses and, backing on to the river, their warehouses. In later periods some of the merchants' houses were given new fashionable frontages resulting in the variety of buildings now seen on the street. This story is preserved in the arrangement and character of the historic buildings in the area.

The wealth generated by the port is easily appreciated in the grandeur and elegance of the historic buildings on King Street, whilst the prestige of the medieval town is reflected in the St George's guild complex.

The area to the west of King Street is built on land reclaimed from the river. Its street plan preserves the port's original interaction with the river's edge, via narrow alleyways leading to landing steps and mooring posts. This is illustrated by Ferry Lane, the alleyway leading from King's Street to the landing steps, which is busy with the public using the West

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Lynn ferry.

The river's edge has buildings backing on the Ouse, a reminder of Lynn's waterfront character until the early 19th century. It mostly has limited public access except at the Common Staithe. Here the historic quay has been greatly extended towards the river to form a modern car park bounded on its western side by a concrete sea defence wall.

On its eastern side the headquarters of the King's Lynn Conservancy Board draws the eye as an historic focal point. The building is brick-built and includes a Pilots Tower built in 1864 with the words 'Pilot's Office' and 'Dues' inscribed on its front elevation. A plaque on the wall of the Conservancy Board's offices notes that the 'line of coping stones across the car park was until 1855 the edge of the town's main public quay.'

On the edge of the quay in front of the Board's offices, under a short, white flagstaff are a number of buoys awaiting refurbishment and redeployment. At the northern end of the quay a narrow concrete-built slipway leads down to the water's edge.

From Common Staithe the streets of Water Lane and Ferry Street lead to the Tuesday market place. The large market place is surrounded by large grand buildings that originally related to the workings of the port including the corn exchange, the Duke Hotel and a number of later merchant houses.

5. Purfleet

In the medieval period up until the 18th century this small fleet or inlet was the focus of Lynn's commercial port. Its past importance is demonstrated by the grandeur of the 17th century Customs House.

Its quay walls are brick-built and their surfaces cobbled. It retains much of its earlier plan except the southern edge, which has been stepped inwards to narrow the fleet. The southern side of Purfleet is now a public space and road leading from South Quay but until the mid-20th century it formed part of King's Staithe Square.

As it has done since the medieval period, Purfleet bridge has formed the eastern side of the harbour. The inlet is now permanently flooded, enclosed by sluice gates to prevent flooding and has been updated and enhanced to reflect the historic importance of the area.

6. Queen Street and South Quay

The urban core of the earliest phase of the town, the sinuous course of Queen and Nelson Streets and St Margaret's Lane, mark the water's edge of the river when Lynn was first established. The river edge was important to the early establishment of the town with St Margaret's church and the Saturday market place built next to it.

As with King Street the earliest development was on the eastern side but following the movement of the river westwards, development followed from the 15th and 16th centuries. Merchants' houses fronted onto

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the streets with warehouses to the rear backing onto the river. This arrangement is preserved in the characteristic street pattern of smaller alleyways and lanes running to the river off the larger main streets.

The Area has a spectacular range of historic buildings that relate to the early history of the port, including Clifton House and its lookout tower, Hampton House, and the Hanseatic complex.

On the river edge is the historic South Quay, built in the early 19th century to project out into the main channel of the Ouse. This created a publically accessible quay which ran alongside the river. Grain stores and warehouses were developed on the landward side of the quay and many of the earlier warehouses were either removed or adapted.

The quay is now largely unused as part of the commercial port. Until recently its southern end was used by commercial vessels unloading goods for the Sommerfield and Thomas store but the grain handling equipment has now been removed and the warehouse awaits redevelopment.

South Quay has been recently revamped and is now mainly used for residential and social purposes as it offers good views to the river, to West Lynn and the fishing boats working from Boal Quay.

7. Boal Quay and Friar's Fleet

The Council-run Boal Quay is used by Lynn's fishermen to moor their boats. The quay is a modern concrete-built wharf running parallel to the river channel. Its location is historic – a quay in the same location was recorded in the early 19th century. The historic course of the Friar's Fleet is now largely silted up, a stranded barge a reminder of its former use, whilst the modern cut for the River Nene marks the southern boundary of the area. The remnants of a former sea defence wall mark the edge of the former course of the river. The wall is traceable amongst the surrounding scrub and salt marsh.

There are little or no upstanding traces of its former industrial past. The Area awaits redevelopment having been earmarked for housing.

8. West Lynn

The sea defence bank runs parallel to the western bank of the River Great Ouse, the path along its top forming a great vantage point to view the waterfront of King's Lynn. The present defence, built to protect the area from flooding, dates to the late 20th century and is a grass covered bank, fringed on the river's edge by salt marsh. This later bank incorporates earlier piecemeal sea defences and previously much of West Lynn had been open to the River Great Ouse.

The banks form part of a more complex, much larger arrangement of sea defences that have been used to defend and reclaim parts of the Fens from at least the medieval period onwards. The banks also form a fantastic vantage point to watch the comings and goings of the river traffic, in particular the port's commercial fishing fleet.

The passenger ferry continues to ply its trade to

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King's Lynn from a floating jetty. A ferry has been running between West Lynn and the town since the 13th century at least.

On the water's edge, projecting out into the Ouse, are a series of short wooden jetties or piers. Dilapidated in appearance, the features date to the late 19th century.

Conservation values of the port heritage assets

In 2008, English Heritage published *Conservation Principles*, containing its framework and guidance for assessing the range of values pertaining to the historic environment (English Heritage 2008). Conservation Principles identifies four main types of values: Evidential, Historical, Aesthetic and Communal Values (*ibid*). The following subsection uses that framework to present a preliminary assessment of the values and significance attached to Lynn's present port-related heritage.

Evidential

– *'the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity'*

King's Lynn contains a wealth of surviving port-related heritage which contribute greatly to its character, the understanding of its development, its unique sense of place and a greater understanding of the history of the broader region and, in particular, of England throughout the medieval period.

The role of the Character Areas in King's Lynn's story as a port is highly significant, especially when considered in the context of the town's historical development: the wealth it generated; the outstanding range and survival of medieval merchant houses, warehouses, Hanseatic warehouse and guild buildings; and the layout and topography of the town. Its influence as a port during the medieval period formed an important part of England's maritime-based economy.

The high concentration and predominantly good survival of medieval merchant's houses, warehouses, guild buildings and the Hanseatic steelyard complex form a significant cluster of Listed Buildings.

Whilst the story of medieval Lynn is of considerable value, the adaptation of the port and its success into the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries is important too. Its success in this period is reflected in its built heritage – the new buildings (such as Customs House) and the updating of the medieval merchants' buildings with new frontages (eg St Margaret's House).

The Docks Character Area from the 1870s onwards is representative of the adaptation of the port to the increasing size of vessels, the navigation problems posed by the River Ouse and the pressure on the historic port infrastructure by development of the railway.

The development of Alexandria and Bentinck Dock in the late 19th century and their connection to the

railway is clear evidence of the growth typical of many commercial ports on the North Sea coast.

A striking feature of Lynn's early port history is how the attempts to improve the drainage of the Fens have had a direct impact on the navigability and use of the port. The drainage schemes occurred in several phases from as early as the 13th century and each time these were undertaken the port had to adapt and change. The schemes culminated in the Estuary Cut, purposely built in 1853 to maintain Lynn as a port. The cut also allowed for the reclamation of further land and the construction of Alexandria and Bentinck Docks.

The material traces of the port's past and surviving fishing activity, especially in relation to the North End and the continued use by local fishing boats of the Fisher Fleet and Boal Quay Character Areas, form significant evidence of the town's historic character.

Historical

– *'the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. It tends to be illustrative or associative'*

The past and present role of Lynn as a port is important to the understanding of the town, its agricultural hinterland and to its place within the larger region.

The Docks Character Area continues the historic link to commercial port-related activity in terms of the import and export of goods through the port, and with its continuing trade with the Baltic, Scandinavia and the Low Countries.

The import and export of bulk agricultural cargo including grain and fertiliser continues to show the importance of the docks as a regional port with links extending into the surrounding farming and commercial hinterland. The continued export of grain from the port is of great relevance to the history of King's Lynn.

The character of the sea defence bank in the West Lynn Character Area and the 'canalised' nature of the River Great Ouse are a tangible link of the ongoing need to improve the navigation of the port, the past and present battle to maintain the channel and the vulnerability of the area to flood events. They are integral to understanding the historical development and continued use of the port. In this respect the establishment and history of the Lynn Conservancy Board is also significant. The Board is similar to many other authorities set up in the late 19th century to safeguard and improve the navigation of individual ports, estuaries and rivers.

Little, if anything, survives of Lynn's historic shipbuilding industry which, within the wider history of Lynn, could benefit from further attention, as it was once an important part of Lynn's maritime history.



Fig 9 The pilot's tower and headquarters of the King's Lynn Conservancy Board.

Aesthetic

– *'the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place'*

As a working commercial cargo port, the Docks Character Area is a busy place with constantly changing activity that generates interest for many, whether from the coming and going of cargo being stored and redistributed, or the buildings and structures associated with its use.

The publically accessible Cross Bank Road offers views to the activity of the Fisher Fleet. Here, due to the smaller scale of the vessels using the Fleet than those using the commercial cargo port, a more intimate view of them can be gained. The ability to watch the fishing vessels approach the Fleet and offload their catch is an aspect of local distinctiveness which many people find of considerable interest and fascination.

The visual appeal of Lynn's Character Areas is easy to appreciate due to the wealth and breadth of their historic buildings, the sinuous street patterns, the narrowness of the lanes, the grandeur of its market places, the fleets, and its quayside areas which give fantastic views to the rich landscape setting provided by the River Great Ouse.

Communal

– *'the meaning of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory'*

The continued economic success of Alexandria and Bentinck Docks is an important focus for the local community and the surrounding agricultural hinterland of West Norfolk.

Considerable pride is associated with the history of the port and its relationship with the development of the town. This pride is reflected in a high level of local interest shown in its history. The town has a wealth of information boards and heritage trails which explain the past importance of the port. These include a trail celebrating the port's relationship with the Hanseatic League, and one of the pilgrimage to Walsingham.



Fig 10 An earlier warehouse surviving on the southern side of Alexandria Dock.

The Walsingham Way is a long-distance walk from King's Lynn to Walsingham. The importance of the pilgrimage site has been reinstated in a modern context.

King's Lynn has several heritage focussed groups including the King's Lynn Preservation Trust, the Friends of True's Yard, the King's Lynn Civic Society, the Marriott's Warehouse Trust and the West Norfolk and King's Lynn Archaeological Society.

Since its foundation in 1958, The King's Lynn Preservation Trust has restored and conserved several buildings in the town. Projects have included merchants' houses including Hampton Court, Clifton House and the Greenland Fishery.

The True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum is a social history Museum. It is an independent museum run almost entirely by volunteers and depicts the story of the old North End fishing quarter of King's Lynn. The museum is supported by the Friends of True's Yard, formed to stimulate interest in the museum's collection and activities.

In the summer of 2014 the West Norfolk and King's Lynn Archaeological Society with support from the Nautical Archaeological Survey and the Marriott's Warehouse Trust, undertook a rapid survey of the foreshore of the River Great Ouse between Boal Quay and the ferry steps below Ferry Lane.

Current levels of heritage protection

The Fishing Fleet Character Area includes Grade II Listed Buildings (LB) associated with King's Lynn's 19th century coastguard station (LBs 1393405, 1393404, 1393229).

On the border of the Docks and King Street Character Areas is the Grade II Listed watergate of St Ann's Fort (LB 1195420).

The King Street, Common Staithe and North End Character Area contains a wealth of Listed Buildings and important unlisted buildings that are identified in the Conservation Area appraisal for the area. The Character Area falls within the St Nicholas Conservation Area – which extends to the Mean Low Water mark (Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk 2008b).



Fig 11 The Fisher Fleet.

There are many Listed Buildings in this area but the following section highlights those with a clear relationship with the historic workings of the port. True's Yard and its smokehouse is Grade II Listed (LB 1393313). Surrounding the Tuesday Market Place, is the Grade II* Bishop Lynn House (remodelled by the Bagge family in the 18th century; LB 1289527) and the Duke Head Hotel (LB 1212229) with the Grade II Listed Corn Exchange (LB 1212488) and Maiden Heade's Hotel (LB 1195405).

On Common Staithe is the Grade II Listed headquarters of the King's Lynn Conservancy Board (LB 1195305).

King Street has a dense cluster of Listed Buildings including the Grade I Listed Guildhall of the Guild of St George (LB 1290960) and in the area, three Grade II Listed former warehouses (LBs 119524, 1220487, 1298185, 1291011). The Museum of Social History was formerly a merchant house and is Grade II* Listed (LB 1298222), as is the Medieval Merchant's House (LB 1291131) and a warehouse nearby (LB 1220209). On the corner of Purfleet Quay is a Grade II Listed house (LB 1291147) and warehouse complex to the rear (LB 1195415). On the east side of King Street is a series of Grade II Listed Buildings and the Grade I Listed medieval house and former warehouse at 28, 30 and 32 King Street (LB 119521).

The Purfleet Character Area straddles the St Nicholas and St Margaret's Conservation Areas. It contains the Grade I Listed Custom's House and north bank of Purfleet Quay (LB 1195414) as well as the Grade II Listed Purfleet Bridge (LB 1220585).

The Queen Street and South Quay Character Area is included within the St Margaret's Conservation Area which, as with the St Nicholas Conservation Area, extends to Mean Low Water. It contains a wealth of Listed Buildings and important unlisted buildings that are identified in the Conservation Area appraisal for the area (Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk 2008a).

Surrounding King's Staithe Square are a number of Grade II Listed Buildings and the Grade II* Bank House (LB 1220654).



Fig 12 Boal Quay.

On King's Staithe Lane are two Grade II former warehouses (LB 1220611 and LB 1195295), and the Grade I Clifton House and its look-out tower (LB 1210377).

On Queen Street are a host of Grade II and Grade II* Listed buildings, most of which are houses. At its lower, southern end is a grade II* Listed house with a warehouse complex to the rear west (LB 1290483).

Around the Saturday Market Place is a cluster of important Listed buildings including the Grade I Listed Guildhall (1211953). The Hanse House, the best surviving Hanseatic steelyard complex in Britain, is a Grade I Listed Building (LB 1195393) and to the rear of it, adjacent to South Quay, the Grade II* Marriott's warehouse (LB 1212000).

At the southern end of South Quay are a series of Grade II Listed Buildings including a warehouse on the corner of St Margaret's Lane (now a Naval Cadets base; LB 1195389) and the warehouse of Sommerfield and Thomas (LB 1195401).

On Nelson Street is the Grade I Listed merchant's house of Hampton Court (LB 1195430) and a Grade II* Listed House re-fronted c 1740 for the Browne family of merchants (LB 1221095) and the Grade II Listed malthouse backing on to Millfleet (LB 1195439).

The Boal Quay and Friar's Fleet Character Area includes the Grade II* Greenland Fishery House on Bridge Street (LB 1219470). Built 1605-8 for the merchant John Atkin it is the last principally timber-framed house known to have been constructed in Lynn. The western side of Bridge Street falls within the Friars Conservation Area (Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk 2008c).

King's Lynn has a mix of local authority, public and community bodies working together to conserve, celebrate and regenerate historic buildings and structures. The town currently has a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) supported Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) to enhance and protect the heritage of the St Margaret's Conservation Area. The HLF have also funded the development of the *Stories of Lynn* exhibition which will include the opening up of museum collections and archives and the remodelling of the town hall complex (Borough of King's Lynn and West Norfolk news webpage).



Fig 13 A plaque commemorating the restoration of the Priory Buildings on Priory Lane, near Saturday Market Place.

Pressures for change

The main pressure upon the commercial port is the need to remain economically viable. Currently, the success of Alexandria and Bentinck Dock and the trade in cargo are reliant on the vitality of the region's agricultural hinterland and the continued ability of the River Great Ouse to handle commercial shipping.

Likewise the success of the commercial fishing fleet will be dependent on economic factors, as well as the health of local shellfish, crustacean and fish stocks.

Brownfield sites next to, or near, the river frontage will be prime areas for redevelopment, especially as these areas are limited in Lynn. The Sommerfield and Thomas site and area of Boal Quay are two areas outlined for residential development (Borough of King's Lynn and west Norfolk site allocations and development management policies webpage).

Visiting the town it is clear that King's Lynn's heritage is much valued by its residents, local authority and many of the private organisations and companies based in the town. These parties have often worked together for the benefit of the town's historic environment and it is important that this positive and proactive relationship continues.

The Shoreline Management Plan 2 (SMP2) provides a long-term risk assessment relating to future coastal evolution and presents a policy framework to address the risks to people and the developed, historic and natural environment in a sustainable manner.

The SMP2 for the Wash makes clear that over the next twenty five years there will be a need to hold the present line of sea defences for the area between Gibraltar Point and Wolferton Creek (Policy Development Zone 1). In the medium to long term (2015 to 2025) the sea defences will continue to be held but this is likely to require increased management and potentially, the managed realignment of them (Environment Agency 2010).



Fig 14 The southern end of South Quay. The Grade II Listed warehouse of Sommerfield and Thomas (far right) awaits redevelopment.

Heritage risk assessment and opportunities

This Port Heritage Summary has highlighted the essential historic character and heritage assets that underpin King's Lynn's port-related character.

Regeneration planning which is informed and inspired by these elements can take a proactive approach to ensure that new developments enhance the distinctiveness and strong 'sense of place' which arise from Lynn's historic cultural development rather than developing it as if from a blank canvas. Such culturally-informed regeneration will ultimately be more sustainable for the local community.

The Grade II Listed Building at 1 King Street (LB 384136), the southern elevation of which forms the north eastern corner of Purfleet Quay, is currently unused and at medium risk.

The Grade II Listed warehouse of Sommerfield and Thomas (LB 1195401) is at medium risk as it is currently unused. However, the area has been allocated for residential use and the retention of the historic building forms part of the condition for future development (Policy area E1.8 – Borough of King's Lynn and West Norfolk site allocations and development management policies webpage).

The area including the extent of Boal Quay and Friar's Fleet is included within Policy area E1.5 which has been allocated for residential use. Compliance for future development will require an archaeological assessment (Borough of King's Lynn and West Norfolk site allocations and development management policies webpage).

Ground disturbance in parts of the Character Areas could potentially reveal buried archaeological deposits, although in certain areas that potential could be limited by previous substantial ground disturbance.

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