

Chichester Harbour

Summary Description

This most easterly of the Solent harbours has a long association with Roman occupation based at Fishbourne. Use of the harbour has continued; today it supports a range of small maritime industries and is a popular base for sailing. Being the least developed of the three eastern Solent harbours it is renowned for natural habitat with the whole area designed as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Sea Surface

Chichester Harbour lies to the south west of Chichester, with an entrance from the Eastern Solent between Selsey and Hayling Island. It comprises an area of some twenty-seven square miles of navigable water. The harbour has four main channels: Emsworth Channel, Thorney Channel, Fishbourne Channel and the Chichester Channel, which also branches off into the Bosham Lake and Itchenor Reach. This large natural harbour is mainly used for recreational boating and yachting and boasts the second largest marina in Britain. As many as 12,500 craft regularly use the harbour, with competitive racing taking place among the 14 sailing clubs of the Chichester Harbour Federation.

There are various anchorages in the harbour: West of Fairway buoy; east of Pilsey Island, and north of East Head, although not within the main channel, due to vessel activity this is classed as a caution area. Local fleets of commercial fishing vessels still operate out of the harbour. A number of local ferries connect Chichester to Itchenor and Emsworth. Water tour boats, in particular the *Solar Heritage* and *Terror*, a restored Victorian oyster dredger boat, feature frequently in the harbour.

Seabed Surface

The harbour is one of few undeveloped coastal areas in the Solent. It is a tidal harbour, with extensive spits of sand and gravel. The mouth is relatively narrow, and the adjacent spits are subject to frequent wave action modification during storms. Minimal maintenance dredging of the channel and its entrance occurs. To the south west of the entrance to Chichester Harbour is Chichester Bar, a shallow spit which can present a significant navigation hazard at all states of the tide. The entrance to the harbour is deep with a fast tidal stream and to the east of the main harbour entrance channel is a gravel bank known as The Winner. The east side of the harbour entrance is an area of geographical, recreational and conservation interest known as East Head. It is a large sand dune linked to land by a narrow area known as The Hinge. In recent years The Hinge has been breached by several storms and then repaired.

The inner part of the inlet is shallow and muddy. The extensive mudflats, saltmarsh, and sandbank areas support a plethora of wildlife (Tubbs, 1999). The intertidal morphology of the harbour consequently means it contains extensive shellfish resources, primarily oyster beds. Commercial fishing is represented in the Bass nursery areas. The whole harbour area has been designated as a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA), a RAMSAR designated area, and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The extensive inter-tidal area of the Harbour means that archaeological features within this zone are focused on industries and functions which have exploited this zone. Recent survey work has revealed an extensive resource of oyster bed remains, jetties, wharves, causeways and remains of attempts to reclaim land. Past archaeological investigations have revealed evidence of prehistoric flint working and iron age and roman saltworking within the inter-tidal zone.

In terms of maritime archaeology there are at least 10 known wrecks and obstructions charted within the harbour, located primarily around the edges of the channels. Geophysical survey of the harbour has revealed a number of other anomalies which are yet to be investigated archaeologically.

Seabed Subsurface

Maintenance dredging of the channel and harbour entrance is a frequent activity which impacts the subsurface deposits. Oyster and bass fishing operations also impact this area.

Recent archaeological research through the 'Rhythms of the Tide' lottery funded project has sought to understand the development of the harbour from a terrestrial landscape into a tidal harbour. Geophysical and borehole surveys have revealed a complex sedimentary sequence which are still being analysed. This work aims to reveal evidence for the potential for survival of submerged prehistoric landscape deposits within the seabed.



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Coastal

The 15 various marinas and boatyards are a prominent features. The harbour offers various public jetties and launch sites. The sewage works and tank farm complexes are the most prominent industrial coastal installations. Prominent coastal archaeological features include the Tournebury Iron Age hillfort, through to distinctive post Medieval buildings such as the 18th century Birdham Tidal Mill and modern military features such as Second World War pillboxes. Five designated nature reserves feature around the coast of the harbour: Nutbourne Marshes, Eames Farm, Pilsey, Sandy Point and Gutner Point.

The harbourside villages are; West Wittering, Itchenor, Birdham, Dell Quay, Fishbourne, Chidham, Prinsted, Thorney Island, Emsworth, Langstone and Northney. The harbour lowlands contain high quality arable farmland and coastal grazing. Boatyards, tourism, marinas and commercial fishing are important elements of the local economy.

Archaeological Potential

The Harbour is a recognised archaeological and historical resource as well as a valued natural environment (Down, 1990). The high potential of the intertidal and seabed surfaces for the preservation and recovery of archaeological material has long been recognised. The harbour and its related channels are also recognised as being part of the ancient Solent river valley system (Bridgland, 2001).

Widespread finds of artefacts of the Neolithic Period, and Iron Age works on Hayling Island, testify to the early settlement of the Chichester Harbour area. Although there is recorded archaeological evidence of prehistoric occupation around the harbour the earliest evidence of the exploitation of the maritime zone for transport, found to date, comes from the Roman period. There is much debate over the extent to which the Harbour would have been navigable in the Roman period, with a particular focus on reaching the Fishbourne villa complex.

The good soils around the harbour attracted early Saxon settlers and agriculture flourished. Grain made the harbour area important in later centuries and in the saltings many examples of broken dykes show where landowners attempted to reclaim land from marsh. Around the shores are the remains of several mills that served the harbour and its hinterland. The harbour developed as an important port, with landings at Dell Quay, Bosham, and Emsworth from the 13th century onwards. The harbour never had deep-water anchorages but it served coastal trading until well after the arrival of the railways. There were considerable fishing fleets and a flourishing oyster dredging industry until into the 20th century. However, it is the development of its recreational potential, particularly in the years since the second world war, which dominate the harbour today.

The Harbour has the potential to reveal evidence of a wide range of archaeological sites and finds. These include prehistoric submerged landscape deposits, eroding prehistoric and historic sites in the intertidal zone and maritime sites in the form of wrecks, cargos and shoreside installations. The potential to encounter the remains of crashed aircraft must also be considered, with many recorded losses which date to the Second World War.

References

- Defra, 2002. Futurecoast: Shoreline Behaviour Study. Unpublished CD Rom. Halcrow Group Ltd.
Tubbs, C. 1999. *The Ecology, Conservation and History of the Solent*. Chichester: Packard Publishing.
Reger, J. 1996. *Chichester Harbour: A History*. Chichester: Phillimore and Co. Ltd.

Links

- Chichester District Council - <http://www.chichester.gov.uk/>
Chichester District Museum - <http://www.chichester.gov.uk/museum/>
Chichester Harbour Trust - <http://chichesterharbourtrust.co.uk/>
Chichester Harbour - <http://www.conservancy.co.uk>
Chichester Harbour Online - <http://www.chichester-harbour.co.uk/>
Bosham Village Website - <http://www.boshamvillage.co.uk/Site/index.html>
Bosham Online - <http://www.bosham.org/>
Dell Quay Marine - <http://www.dellquay.com/>
Chichester Harbour Villages - http://www.conservancy.co.uk/out/harbour_villages.asp?village=Birdham
Chichester Harbour Villages - http://www.conservancy.co.uk/out/harbour_villages.asp?village=Thorney%20Island
Chichester Harbour Villages - http://www.conservancy.co.uk/out/harbour_villages.asp?village=Nutbourne,%20Prinsted%20and%20Southbourne
Hayling Island - <http://www.hayling.co.uk/>
Hayling Island History - <http://www.localhistories.org/hayling>



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Images



Reference:	CH02 – A12
Character Area	Chichester Harbour
Description	Chichester Harbour – across harbour, tide out
Photographer:	Paul Donohue
Date Photographed:	2006



IoE number:	300580
Character Area:	Chichester Harbour
Description:	Birdham – Birdham Pool
Photographer:	Mr Michael Parry
Date Photographed:	28 June 2001
Date listed:	10 May 1973
Date of last amendment:	10 May 1973
Grade	II



Reference:	CH02 – A08
Character Area	Chichester Harbour
Description	Hulks north of Dell Quay
Photographer:	Julie Satchell
Date Photographed:	2004



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