

# Poole Harbour

## Summary Description

Poole Harbour is one of the world's largest natural harbours. It has been a centre for human occupation for many centuries. A legacy of maritime trade and transport can be seen through remains of Roman shoreside structures, an Iron Age logboat find and the numerous buildings and structures relating to more recent vessel traffic. The modern commercial port and leisure sailing industries of the Harbour are balanced against significant cultural remains and ecological habitats.

## Sea Surface

This natural harbour is situated in the north-western portion of the Solent and Wight area, sheltered from the wind in all directions. Double high tide means 14 hours of high water, making the harbour popular with a variety of groups. Activity on the sea surface is dominated by commercial shipping. The presence of a modern port makes it a busy commercial area. However, it also features Poole Quay, which is home to small boats and fishing craft. The entrance to the inlet is designated for use as a military practice area. A fleet of commercial fishing vessels operate out of the port. Frequent large-scale passenger ferries connect Poole Harbour to Cherbourg via the Channel Islands. Smaller, local ferries connect Poole Quay with Brownsea Island, similarly, a car ferry from Sandbanks to Studland and the Isle of Purbeck operates year round.

The harbour is a popular site for marine recreation activities, most notably sailing, windsurfing, and water-skiing.

## Seabed Surface

The entrance to Poole harbour is formed of two long narrow shingle spits, the geomorphology of the harbour comprises a gently subsiding basin. The area features Sandbanks at its entrance and Brownsea Island within the inlet. Within the Harbour itself there are extensive intertidal mudflats and saltmarsh, especially surrounding the islets and Brownsea Island. The sediments become sandier near the mouth of the inlet. These extensive sandbanks around the inlets entrance, when required, are dredged for maintenance purposes.

The intertidal morphology of the harbour consequently means it contains extensive shellfish resources, primarily oyster beds, although mussels and clams are also popular. Commercial fishing is represented in the presence of the Marine fisheries farm located in the north-eastern side of the harbour. Bait digging frequently occurs along the shoreline, however, this is illegal due to the damage it causes to the seabed. The presence of the strong sea wall structure, since the 1850s, provides defence against erosion and further inundation, however is contributing to the process of coastal squeeze.

The whole harbour area has been designated as a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and a RAMSAR designated area.

Archaeological sites and features close to the coast include, evidence of the salt making industry, prehistoric flint working, out cropping peat deposits and a potential iron age Harbour.

In the marine zone there are at least 45-50 wreck and obstructions located in the harbour, with specific concentrations around the harbour entrance and other heavily sand banked areas. The most significant water craft find to date from this area is an Iron Age logboat.

## Seabed Subsurface

The subsurface features submarine cables for the purposes of industry.

Maintenance dredging of the harbour entrance is regularly carried out and very recently a capital dredge has taken place to deepen the existing channel. The remains of prehistoric submerged landscapes and associated peat deposits are present within the seabed.



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## Coastal

The harbour constructions are the most visible features of the coastal zone, and provide facilities for commercial activity. However, the 3 miles of golden beaches from Sandbanks to Branksome Dene Chine at the entrance to Poole Harbour are popular with visitors. Poole Aquarium is on the Quay, as are buildings of interest such as the Georgian-style Custom house. The old town, a conservation area, is behind the Quay.

Brownsea Island is known as the birthplace of the scouting movement. Defensive structures such as Branksea castle, built by Henry VIII to defend Poole Harbour from French invasion still stand. The island also contains 500 acres of heath and woodland, a nature reserve and a bird sanctuary. It is owned by the National Trust and open from Easter to September, and can be reached by boat from Poole Quay.

## Archaeological Potential

When describing the archaeological potential of the harbour, the impact of eustatic and sea level change on human activity and use of marine resources, should be considered. The shape and form of the harbour is a result of Holocene sea-level rise that has inundated the original topography of the Frome and Piddle river valleys. Ancient exploitation of seascape resources were similar to modern, with evidence of fishing, shellfish harvesting, recovery of salt, and the use of the creeks and channels as anchorages.

Archaeological investigations of the Harbour area have revealed a rich resource. Specific flintwork finds dating from the lower Palaeolithic to the Mesolithic have been recorded. This archaeological data helps demonstrate the development of the Harbour from dry land to marine conditions. A number of prehistoric peat deposits have been recorded around the inlet and these offer particular opportunities to reconstruct the past behavioral history of the harbour. Evidence of the Iron-Age Harbour have recently been discovered.

Activities noted around the shallow harbour during the Iron Age and Roman periods were salt production, brick making, peat working, oyster farming, and fishing. The remnants of what was believed to be a currently submerged causeway at Green Island have recently been investigated and suggest that it was either the site of crossing point to the mainland or a harbour construction for Iron Age and Roman shipping.

## References

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- Poole Harbour Excavations reveal evidence for an Iron Age jetty*. CURRENT ARCHAEOLOGY 2002, VOL 16; PART 1; ISSU 181, pages 7-10

## Links

- Dorset Coastal Forum - <http://www.dorsetcoast.com/index>
- Poole Harbour Tourism - <http://www.pooletourism.com/>
- Poole Harbour Study Group - <http://www.pooleharbourstudygroup.org.uk/>
- Poole Harbour Commissioners - <http://www.phc.co.uk/>
- Poole Harbour Support Website - <http://www.pooleharbour.org.uk/>
- Iron-age port in Poole Harbour - <http://www.dceda.org.uk/3-4marine/3detailed.html>
- National Trust Brownsea Island: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-vh/w-visits/w-findaplace/w-brownseaisland/>
- Dorset Wildlife Trust Brownsea Island: <http://www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/dorset/reserves/brownsea.htm>
- Isle of Purbeck Brownsea Island: <http://www.isleofpurbeck.com/brownsea.html>
- Sandbanks: <http://www.thedorsetpage.com/locations/place/S020.htm>

## Images



HWTMA Photo Number	POO3 – A15
Character Area	Poole
Description	Poole Harbour Swing Bridge
Photographer:	Julie Satchell
Date Photographed:	2003



IoE number:	109073
Character Area	Poole Harbour Approaches
Description	Brownsea Island – Branksea Castle
Photographer:	Mr J E Leeson LRPS
Date Photographed:	18 June 2002
Date listed:	13 December 1984



HWTMA Photo Number	POO3 – B01
Character Area	Poole
Description	Poole Harbour Backwater Channel
Photographer:	Julie Satchell
Date Photographed:	2003