

Southampton Port

Summary Description

Southampton Port is one of the busiest commercial ports in the country. Inevitably this has led to the modern waterfront being dominated by the large dock complexes. The maritime nature of Southampton has been one of the main foundations of its prosperity from the Saxon period through to modern day. Southampton is renowned for having been a thriving centre for Medieval and Post Medieval trading, this legacy continues today with high volumes of shipping for commercial and leisure purposes.

Sea Surface

Due to its sheltered position, deep channel, easy approach, and double high water, Southampton has always been the logical choice for a major port. This northern part of Southampton Water is characterised by two channels; the deep navigable channel of the River Test and that of the River Itchen. The Itchen marks the eastern edge of Southampton's port area. The northern-most section of the river Test, which leads up to Redbridge Wharf, is a popular site for marine recreation activities, most notably sailing, windsurfing, and water-skiing.

The main shipping channel is marked on either side by navigation aids, primarily buoys in both the Test and Itchen rivers. Anchorage areas are marked away from the main fairway of Southampton Water, and at the mouth of the Itchen estuary. Clearly marked caution areas enable smaller vessels to navigate the channel safely.

Activity on the sea surface is dominated by commercial shipping. The presence of a cruise liner terminal, east and western docks, and container depot, within the port, makes it a busy commercial area. Local ferries crossings connect Southampton to Cowes on the Isle of Wight.

Southampton has been frequented by some infamous ships. Today the impressive shape of the QE2 is a frequent visitor on the water; another famous luxury liner – the Titanic - embarked from Southampton in 1912 on its way to disaster in the open water. In 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers gathered in Southampton and set sail for the New World in the *Speedwell* and *Mayflower*, the latter of which is remembered in many place name in Southampton.

Seabed Surface

This portion of Southampton water forms an enclosed estuary, with a single gravel spit on the western side and is fed by two major rivers flowing into the upper end. Prominent seabed surface features include extensive mudflats and salt marshes on the western side, and at the upper end beyond the docks at Redbridge. These morphological features support shellfish resources, primarily oyster beds. The eastern side of this area is characterised by mixed gravel and mud beaches. Sandbanks also characterise the western banks of the rivers Test and Itchen, posing moderately hazardous navigation features. The Gymp Shoal and an area of foul ground present within the main channel are additional caution areas.

The channel margins are heavily committed to industrial and urban use and the seabed is subject to many navigation requirements. Extensive maintenance dredging operations of the channels frequently occur. To date around 55% of the intertidal area has been sacrificed to port and industrial developments (Tubbs, 1999) along Southampton Water.

The busy maritime nature of the area is reflected in the 13 charted wrecks and obstructions, which lie primarily in the western part of the River Test's channel. A further 15 charted sites are located within the Itchen channel. In the intertidal area a wealth of hulked vessels can be viewed, these reflect the changing nature of maritime activity at the port and are an important historical resource.

Seabed Subsurface

Extensive dredging of the channels is a frequent activity which impacts the seabed subsurface. Oyster fishing operations in the intertidal and mudflat environments also occurs, with some subsurface impact.

Geoarchaeological investigations have been carried out in the marine zone, in the form of interpretation of borehole samples and pollen records at recorded points. Results identified the deepest sediments in Southampton Water as marine silty clays present beneath Calshot Spit at depths of around minus 20 metres below Ordnance Datum (Waller and Long, 2003, 353). The pre-Holocene surface was recorded at around 3 metres below the modern surface at Graving Dock, Southampton Water (Waller and Long, 2003, 353). This evidence points to the presence of submerged prehistoric landscapes existing within the channel and intertidal margins. However, the industrial development of the area may have had a damaging effect on the survival of some palaeolandscape deposits.



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Coastal

Southampton Port was referred to as 'the Gateway to the world' due to its international cargo and passenger facilities from the 1930s onwards. Although the town was badly damaged during the WW2 bombings, the docks remained relatively intact.

The commercial concrete dock and port installations which provide facilities for commercial activity are the most visible features of the coastal zone. Southampton Port serves as a major international container port and cruise port. It is the second largest container port in the UK. Port facilities comprise: the container terminal (northern most end of the port complex), the Western Docks (one of the largest dry docks), Town quay, Eastern Docks: Ocean Dock and Empress Dock.

The Itchen foreshore features a number of wharves and jetties, known as the 'Itchen Wharves'. The western bank of the river Test features Marchwood where a sewage works complex operates and various other industrial installations. Pier structures occur along the river Test at various locations.

Due to the long history of maritime use and associated occupation in the area there is a vast wealth of information available on the archaeology and development of the city of Southampton. Since the Saxon period the area has been influenced by goods and people brought in by sea.

Archaeological Potential

Despite the extensive dredging and heavy industrial use of the area there is evidence that submerged prehistoric landscapes deposits can and do survive within the seabed sediments. This stratigraphic archive is essential for understanding sea level and climate change and the effects on early human populations and the development of Britain as an island and the Solent as a tidal waterway.

In terms of maritime archaeology there is the potential to reveal evidence of the use of the area as a principle port in a wide variety of shore side locations. The frequency with which ship timbers were re-used in buildings and waterside structures should be highlighted.

In the intertidal zone there are traces of early human occupation from times of lower sealevel and a variety of historic industries. While in the marine zone the potential shipwreck resource is significant. 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

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Links

- Southampton City Council - <http://www.southampton.gov.uk/>
- University of Southampton - <http://www.soton.ac.uk/>
- Visit Southampton - <http://www.visit-southampton.co.uk/>
- Port of Southampton - <http://www.abports.co.uk/custinfo/ports/soton.htm>
- Hall of Aviation - <http://www.spitfireonline.co.uk/>
- PortCities Southampton - <http://www.plimsoll.org/>
- National Oceanography Centre - <http://www.noc.soton.ac.uk/>
- Southampton Museums - <http://www.southampton.gov.uk/leisure/history/museums-galleries/>
- River Itchen Website - <http://www.geog.port.ac.uk/webmap/itchen/>
- River Itchen Sustainability Study - <http://www.riveritchensustainability.org.uk/>

Images



IoE number:	135948
Location:	Southampton
Description:	Section of Town Wall running from the point of junction with the castle wall, just North of Simnel Street, to its Eastern termination just West of Bargate
Photographer:	Mr Trevor Defferd
Date Photographed:	01 August 2004
Date listed:	14 July 1953
Date of last amendment:	14 July 1953
Grade	II



HWTMA Photo Number	IRC – C10
Character Area	Southampton Water Eastern Approaches
Description	Itchen River Cobden Bridge Boat – view of surrounding area
Photographer:	
Date Photographed:	
Date listed:	



HWTMA Photo Number	IRC – E11
Character Area	Southampton Water Eastern Approaches
Description	Itchen River Cobden Bridge Boat – boat
Photographer:	
Date Photographed:	
Date listed:	



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