

Broad Character: Ports and Docks
Character Type: Ports and Docks
National Perspective

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING/DISTINGUISHING ATTRIBUTES

The Character Type Port, Docks and Harbours includes the following Sub-types:

- Dockyard (Civil)
- Wet dock
- Harbour
- Landing point
- Working pier
- Port
- Quay
- Breakwater
- Terminal building
- Warehousing

This Character Type relates to areas dominated by the functioning of ports and docks, together with their harbours and directly port-related industry, features and imprints.

A 'Civil dockyard' is an area, often enclosed, in which ships used primarily for non-military activities are built and repaired, and where ships' stores are brought together (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk>).

A 'Wet dock' is a built structure or group of structures enclosing an area of water which was impounded by lock gates to maintain water levels artificially, facilitating the loading, unloading, building or repair of ships.

Harbour is an area on the coast where ships can find shelter or safe anchorage. Harbours require features that provide shelter and a pool area large and deep enough to accommodate vessels at anchor. The necessary shelter and pool may be provided by unmodified topographic features or by artificial walls and breakwaters, while pools may have floors and access channels deepened by dredging. Where the dominant character of a harbour area's activity is governed by dedicated harbour-navigation administrative controls, the harbour may have been assessed as a 'Harbour pool' discussed in the 'Navigation' Character Type text.

A 'Landing point' is a place where vessels can land passengers and goods (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk>).

A 'Working pier' is a raised platform, generally of iron or wood, supported on spaced pillars or props and projecting out into the sea and designed to facilitate the transfer of cargo and/or passengers on and off shipping. They vary considerably in size and complexity, providing raised access over the sea from the shore to an adjacent position near or below MLW. Working piers incorporate landing points for shipping at their end and/or along their sides. They are distinguished from 'pleasure piers', whose function is primarily recreational and which are discussed in the 'Recreation' Broad Type and Character Type.

A 'port' is a settlement area that combines a harbour and terminal facilities at the interface between land and water transportation systems (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk>).

A 'quay' is an artificial bank or landing place, largely of solid construction, built parallel to, or projecting out from, the shoreline to facilitate the loading and unloading of vessels (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk>).

A 'breakwater' is a structure which protects a beach or harbour by breaking the force of the waves (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk>). Breakwaters may be constructed entirely offshore at a strategic location or with one end attached to land. Commonly associated with ports and navigable river mouths, breakwaters often have subsidiary roles in helping keep harbours and river mouths free from silts and in carrying maritime safety structures, not least to warn of the presence of the breakwater itself.

A 'terminal building' is a building within a transport terminal, often associated with the registration and clearing of incoming and outgoing passengers or freight (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk>).

'Warehousing' refers to an area, forming an integral part of a port, dock or harbour, which is characterised by buildings used for the storage of goods or merchandise (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk>). Warehousing areas known to have been specifically associated with the fishing industry are discussed under 'Fish warehousing' in the 'Fishing' Character Type text. Warehousing located outside recognised port, harbour and dock areas and lacking any clear distinctive maritime character is not covered by HSC: it forms an aspect of relevance to HLC instead.

Port areas involve artificial coastal or riverine facilities where boats and ships can load and unload. Ports often have cargo-handling equipment such as cranes and forklifts for loading and unloading of ships. Often, ports may have warehouses for storage of goods and a transport system for transporting goods inland (e.g. railway, road transport or pipeline transport facilities). Harbour pilots, barges and tugboats are frequently used to manoeuvre large ships in tight quarters as they approach and leave ports (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port>). The presence of deep water in channels or berths, the provision of protection from the wind, waves and storm surges and access to intermodal transportation such as trains or trucks are critical to the functioning of ports.

Ports form the interface between land and marine transport and distribution systems. In that role they perform a range of functions: to receive ships; to transfer and accommodate cargo and people moving to and from ships; to provide a coastal distribution hub for various scales of hinterland; to provide dockyard maintenance and repair facilities, again at various scales, and to offer shelter from storms. Associated features include the necessary structures to ensure safe approach, entry to and landing at the port, such as breakwaters, harbours, quays, wharves. Harbour pilots, barges and tugboats are commonly used to manoeuvre large ships in tight quarters as they approach and leave ports. Many ports have maintained deep water channels and berths: many of the aspects covered by the 'Navigation' Character Type are closely associated with ports. Ship maintenance, supply and repair facilities may be small in scale or enlarged to form enclosed dockyards. Transfer and reception of goods and passengers includes terminal facilities and closely associated car parks; in some cases also customs and immigration facilities. Ports usually include areas of hotel accommodation for passengers in transit and housing for workers servicing the port. Loading and unloading of goods requires storage and transfer areas: now often involving container storage and 'big sheds', but historically too, warehousing grouped around or behind the quays. Processing and manufacturing facilities from various industries are often located very close by, while some ports have specialist areas for landing and distributing fish, with characteristics relating to the 'Fishing' Broad Character Type. From their role as coastal distribution hubs, many ports also have extensive areas devoted to road and rail transport linking with their landward catchment and hinterland: sometimes a national one for the bigger ports.

Ports do not have an assured lifespan and may become redundant for many reasons. Rye (East Sussex) was an important English port in the medieval period, but sediment accretion and land reclamation have considerably altered the coastline and it is now 2 miles (3.2 km) from the sea. London, on the River Thames, and Manchester, at the head

of the Manchester Ship Canal, were once important international ports, but changes in shipping and cargo-handling methods, notably the use of containers and larger ships, put them at a disadvantage (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port>) to expanded and new container ports at Felixstowe, Suffolk and, under construction from 2010, the London Gateway complex on the Essex coast of the Thames Estuary.

HISTORICAL PROCESSES; COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND VARIABILITY

Typical components of this Character Type include:

- landing stages, wharfs, jetties, pontoons, slipways, terminals;
- port administration and regulation areas;
- slipways with cranes or ramps.
- cargo-handling equipment, storage facilities;
- custom areas, quarantine areas;
- pilot stations, small craft facilities;
- wrecks;
- lighthouses, batteries;
- specifically associated transport systems (such as railways, roads, tramways).

Whilst seaborne traffic has been a strong element in British prehistory since the Neolithic period, it is only in the Iron Age that there is clear archaeological evidence for a port. Prior to this ships and boats are likely to have been dragged up onto sheltered beaches and mudflats, with any evidence from that likely to be in the form of coastal settlements and intertidal artefact concentrations. Mount Batten, a sheltered promontory in Plymouth Sound shows a sudden growth in metalworking and evidence for trade with west Cornwall, Dorset, and Brittany from the 8th century BC (Cunliffe 1988). Evidence for more permanent port facilities appear at Poole Harbour in the late 3rd century BC and at Hengistbury Head in the early 1st century BC in the form of jetties and a gravel hard adjacent to an inlet respectively (Parfitt 2004, 100).

During the Roman occupation, Poole Harbour continued to be a major civilian port and others were established or continued at Colchester, London, Rochester, Chichester, Bitterne (Southampton), Exeter and Gloucester (Mason 2003, 116). Military ports may also have been used by civilian traffic. These would all have had quays and jetties, warehouses, and administrative buildings.

Smaller native settlements with less infrastructure will have existed around the coast. An example of one of these may be represented by Lellizzick, near Padstow on Cornwall's Camel Estuary, where up to 70 circular structures representing a multi-phase settlement spanning the Roman and Post-Roman periods shows evidence of trade with continental Europe throughout its lifetime. Boats would have been drawn up onto the sheltered beach immediately below the settlement. Similar arrangements may well have occurred at nearby Tintagel during the Post Roman period, where there is evidence of substantial trade with Latin Europe: 19th century photographs show beached vessels loading slate cargo at Tintagel Haven at that late date.

The first post-Roman English towns appear in the 7th and 8th centuries as settlement and centralized political control became more established. A significant number of these English towns were sea and river ports (Friel 2003: 25). The growth of ports was occurring at an international level, since ports trade with other ports. This period is marked by the development of settlements on both sides of the North Sea and the English Channel, with the Germanic word-element *wic*, meaning 'trading place', incorporated into their names (e.g. Runswick, Saltwick, Gippeswic (Ipswich), Hamwic (Southampton), *Lundenwic* (London), and *Eorforwic* (York)). These towns were mostly located on navigable rivers or in good coastal harbours (Friel 2003: 25-26).

Small hards, quays and landing places all around England were used as means for transferring goods since marine transport was faster and more efficient than via road.

Some examples have been identified in the Hamble area (Hampshire) (see Hampshire & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology 2008, downloadable from <http://www.hwtma.org.uk/index.php?page=project-3>).

During the 8th century sea trade, and its prosperity, operated as a major fuel of economic growth in England. The growth of ports was generally stimulated deliberately by local rulers and, from early times, it seems that the government was involved in trade. The link between trade and wealth underpinned its regulation and protection.

Customs: the duties, tolls, or imposts imposed by the sovereign law of a country on imports or exports, are widely enforced at ports and landing places by customs agencies, establishments, or procedures. In England, customs duties were traditionally part of the *customary revenue* of the king, and therefore did not need parliamentary consent to be levied, unlike excise duty, land tax, or other forms of taxes.

Quays or wharfs (structures built along or projecting from the shore of navigable waters) are necessary components of ports, allowing ships and other vessels to load and discharge cargo and passengers. Wharves may occur far upstream along rivers where they may be served by small craft which could get through any bridge arches, carrying coastal shipments or cargoes off-loaded from bigger ships. 'Creeping waterfronts' are another characteristic commonly found at quays and wharfage. At their simplest, they are responses to silt built up against the waterfront, making it difficult for larger vessels to tie up: a new quay would be built further out to provide sufficient depth of water for these larger vessels. But the process of repeated waterfront expansion into the sea or a river estuary has often been by deliberate land reclamation to increase the area available for land-based port facilities and to enhance the vessel mooring capabilities. This process, infilling behind the new waterfront at each stage with rubble and often archaeologically-rich occupation deposits, has occurred since the Roman period, at London and York for example.

The East Anglian ports such as Great Yarmouth and Dunwich enjoyed a degree of eminence during the Middle Ages due to their proximity to the continent and the export needs of their hinterland's extensive textile industry. However economic, political and coastal processes combined between 1300 and 1600 to bring about the collapse and decay of virtually all their international trade. In the 16th and 17th centuries, heightened threats of piracy also placed pressure on long distance trade from many smaller ports.

Perhaps the most dramatic downfall of a port is exemplified by Dunwich in Suffolk, East Anglia's premier port in the 11th century with a population of 3000. Between 1286 and 1326 the port and town was effectively destroyed following two major storms and a gradual silting of the harbour.

Piers (often used as landing places, promenades or to protect or create a harbour) are also essential components of ports. Piers range in size, form and complexity from a simple lightweight wooden structures to massive solid structures extending over a mile out to sea. Lightweight piers are supported by widely spread piles or pillars allowing tides and currents to flow almost unhindered. In England, the term pier is principally associated with the image of a Victorian cast iron pleasure pier but many also function as port landing places and as harbour breakwaters.

The arrival of the railways established a number of ports including Felixstowe, Suffolk, which was founded in 1875 by Colonel George Tomline, creating the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Company. Felixstowe is now the largest container port in the UK and pioneered the construction of container ships and the development of roll-on/roll-off (Ro ro) ferries. Other established ports flourished in the railway age as freight and passengers were more easily transported to the coast. Major 20th century improvements in land freight transport also led to a massive decline in smaller ports' competitiveness.

Shipping and maritime trade through our ports are important elements of the UK economy and, in 2002, it was estimated that around 95% of the UK's international trade by volume was transported by sea (DTI 2002). In general, major ports and 'sea ports' handle ocean-going vessels, and 'river' ports are mainly related to river traffic, such as barges and other shallow draft vessels. Some ports on a lake, river, or canal have access to a sea or ocean, and are sometimes referred to as 'inland ports'.

VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS

Ports and docks are perceived by visitors and locals in different, often conflicting, ways. They may be perceived as highly competitive commercial entities, commercial centres, or recreational places of iconic historic importance, as at Liverpool's Albert Dock. Ports and docks might be perceived as areas that allowed the connection of distant regions, places and people, with many and varied cultural influences. Liverpool's transatlantic port connections have been identified as one factor contributing to the city's early rise to prominence in the postwar popular music industry. Ports and docks have also inspired many artists and writers. However, major ports can also bring to mind historical aspects seen as less welcome, such as the slave trade and smuggling.

The historic roles of civil ports and docks in the building of England as major maritime trading force in the 19th and early 20th centuries is probably well recognised but the major modern container ports are generally not closely integrated with most people's common experience. Many people are probably now unaware of the enormous proportion of the goods they use that are brought into the country through our ports.

RESEARCH, AMENITY AND EDUCATION

In general, historical narratives about ports and docks as well as work on their associated coastal wrecks are well documented but relatively little work has yet been done to use this documentation to better understand the present form, character and distinctiveness of our current and historic ports and dockyard areas. That will provide the connections needed for these places' heritage to play its full role in informing planning and regeneration to future coastal settlements, in many cases still as ports, where their cultural legibility and distinctiveness remains.

In respect of the rapid changes in England's late 20th and early 21st century economy, while imports have maintained high levels, the rise of the financial services and service sectors have been accompanied by a rapid decline in manufacturing and hence exports, which has altered some ports. It is likely that much of the industrial imprint associated with ports may be prone to redevelopment, leaving some urgency in recording their present features and assessing their roles and viability for the future.

Ports and docks also have a strong amenity value linked to recreational and leisure activities such as sailing. There is also potential for educational and outreach activities such as visits to harbours, local history courses in schools and in further education as well as a source of inspiration to historians and writers.

CONDITION AND FORCES FOR CHANGE

Ports and docks in England experienced many changes that created their long, complex and dynamic histories. Many of these ports and docks still remain active (e.g. London, Liverpool, Southampton, Portsmouth), others have been reused for other activities such as commercial and recreational centres or marinas (e.g. Liverpool's earlier waterfront docks declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004) and others that have been abandoned.

The late 20th and early 21st century economic changes noted above have had serious effects on the form and viability of many older or smaller ports, as has technological change, especially the general move to containerised shipping transport. These factors, and the rise of highly centralised land-freight distribution systems, have greatly favoured the building of modern container ports as wholly new sites with massive investment in new infrastructure to link them to their markets, as at the London Gateway container port being built from 2010 (<http://www.londongateway.com/>).

RARITY AND VULNERABILITY

Past and present ports of varying size and date are quite densely distributed around England's coastline. Many are well recorded historically but the greatest vulnerability probably lies in the redevelopment, and in some cases the withdrawal of port functions, from several of our current larger ports due to the changing factors discussed in the previous two sections. Their vulnerability can be seen in those port areas that have been transformed into commercial and recreational centres or marinas. Many of the specific issues relevant for consideration here are discussed in an English Heritage policy guidance note 'Ports: The impact of development on the maritime historic environment' (<http://www.helm.org.uk/upload/pdf/Ports-policy.pdf?1296822223>).

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