

Broad Character: Settlement
Character Type: Settlement
National Perspective

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING/DISTINGUISHING ATTRIBUTES

The Character Type Settlement includes the following Sub-types:

- Town
- Village

This Character Type relates to contiguous areas dominated by built structures serving various human activities including habitation. The range of activities beyond habitation, and extent of associated infrastructure, varies considerably.

The application of settlement terminology also varies enormously across England. A good example is provided by the differing applications of the term 'village' in areas of nucleated and dispersed settlement patterns and, partly related to that, the considerable sub-regional differences in the scale of settlement to which the term 'village' is considered appropriate. Relativism in application nationally is probably inevitable across HSC around different parts of the coastline and is not necessarily to be deprecated: it reflects regional and smaller scale differences in settlement perception.

So accepting there will be such differing perceptions of the terms around the coasts, fairly bland and relativist definitions are seen as entirely appropriate here:

A 'town' is an assemblage of public and private buildings, larger than a village and having more complete and independent local government (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk/>).

A 'village' is a collection of dwelling-houses and other buildings, usually smaller than a town with a simpler organisation and administration (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk/>).

The term 'settlement' is generally used in disciplines such as archaeology, landscape history and other subjects to define a permanent or temporary community in which people live but along with that function is the potential for an enormous range of other socio-economic activities too, all of which may leave material imprints, whether or not structural. A settlement can therefore range in size from a small number of dwellings grouped together, to larger cities with surrounding urbanized areas. Settlement development can be based on analysis of archaeological or historical sources including, for the latest periods, historic Ordnance Survey maps; aerial photographs and local history.

In the context of HSC settlements are included where they are considered to be of maritime character. Coastal towns and villages often at least partially make their living from the sea and are inexorably linked to it as a consequence of their location.

HISTORICAL PROCESSES; COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND VARIABILITY

Typical components of this Character Type include:

- roads and trackways;
- enclosures;
- field systems;
- boundary banks and ditches;
- ponds, parks and woods;
- mills;
- manor houses, moats and churches, amongst others.

Settlement is a complex Character Type with different and numerous historical trajectories contributing to its present form. Therefore it is characterised by change and complexity but also strong elements of continuity. The variability of this Character Type is extensive, from region to region and from major metropolitan areas such as London, to tiny villages providing shelter for boats during stormy weather.

During the Neolithic period, the introduction of domesticated crops and animals had a profound effect on the development of settlement, land use and the landscape, intensifying changes already apparent in the preceding Mesolithic period. Pollen analysis has indicated phases of clearance, regeneration and further clearance. In some places, clearance was followed by soil deterioration initiating a process of degradation that was never reversed in some areas whose topography produced conditions of high rainfall and exposure. The present open higher moorlands of Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Yorkshire are a product of this combined effect of human management and topographic form, an effect particularly apparent from the Bronze Age onwards (Aston 2000: 23).

During the Roman conquest, many new features were introduced to the landscape and new types of settlement appeared. Formal roads were built with military precision. Military forts were an innovation to the English landscape. Many, but not all, larger Roman towns seem to have developed from earlier forts, reflecting Roman strategic and tactical decisions. The introduction of the monetary system and the existence of markets in towns contributed to develop a more commercial economy in some areas. In late and post-Roman periods, the infrastructure enabling this commercial economy was disrupted and abandoned, returning to its former subsistence level (see Aston 2000). Large areas of former Roman towns appear to have fallen into neglect, developing black earth deposits over debris from previous floors and buildings.

Medieval English coastal towns and villages generally comprised fishing communities using small harbours, often little, if at all, protected by artificial harbour walling. Others sited on tidal rivers (often now silted) were trading centres. Most currently extant buildings in such settlements (except churches) are post medieval or modern. Some settlements were also built on shipbuilding industries and naval centres. Medieval coastal towns were often prosperous as a result of their proximity to the sea and their ability to therefore control trade and exchange.

During the post-medieval period settlements grew slowly at first. During the later 18th century, many coastal settlements started to rapidly expand with increased industrial activity and the growth of commercial activities. As a result, several new towns and industrial villages also grew up along the coast. The housing in these small communities was normally provided by the owners of the industrial enterprises who also built schools, hospitals, and chapels. The houses were often built in terraces with an allotment to the rear of the house. Rows of terraced houses can still be seen in many English coastal villages today.

The arrival of railways in the 19th century also encouraged the development of many coastal towns and villages, both by allowing their accessibility to tourist visitors and by enabling marine and coastal resources, notably fish for food, to reach large inland markets. By the 20th century, some towns and villages were created purely to house visitors such as Thorpeness in Suffolk. This mock-Tudor and *faux*-Bavarian village was the creation of a local landowner (Glencairn Stuart Oglivie) in the early 20th century who created a central mere by damming part of a tidal delta.

In the later 20th century, most coastal settlements also expanded through the provision of housing estates for local families and new residences for a growing population of retired people and people wanting second or holiday homes (e.g. in Cornwall and East Anglia). Many of England's coastal settlements are now largely residential or serve the tourist industry after their former industrial, harbour and port functions have died away.

Before the end of World War Two, many coastal settlements lacked basic, modern, sanitary amenities. Many of them were tenement buildings erected in the second half of the 18th century to accommodate the influx of labour to work in the shipyards, graving docks and ironstone mines (Frank 2002).

Today, England's coastal settlements vary greatly in form and function but all of them have a variety of building types from a range of periods, different sectors for residence, commerce, industry, storage, recreation, burial and ceremonial uses. Some settlements also have military remains (from medieval castles to 20th century pillboxes) and most settlements have at least some areas of rich subsurface remains with the footings of past buildings and features of medieval or earlier periods.

VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS

There is an abundance of documentary sources stretching back at least three hundred years for most English coastal settlements but material remains, whether visible or buried archaeologically, may well date back far further to the early historic or prehistoric origins of the settlement. Influences from these settlements' past development may also be reflected in the street plans, market places, and surviving medieval buildings (e.g. castles and churches). Street names may also reveal now lost features or activities (e.g. Far Jetticks, Friarage Field, Iron Scar and Whale Hill amongst others). The discovery of artefacts and features encountered during developments and roadworks in towns represent a reminder to the observant dwellers of the richness of their town's past.

Coastal towns and villages also have important roles for mariners, not only as destinations and economic opportunities but also as distinct places signifying their position along the coastline or relative to inshore hazards. They are also watering and supply places, providing a breadth of necessary facilities and social life.

RESEARCH, AMENITY AND EDUCATION

Settlement patterns have been researched from many perspectives and these studies vary immensely. Of particular relevance is the work by Stuart Roberts and Brian Wrathmell (2000) characterising England's rural settlement patterns, of which patterns of coastal settlement form a distinct subset. Sociologists and historical geographers have also extensively researched patterns of urbanisation and urban regeneration. Smaller settlements have also seen dramatic changes throughout the 20th century whose drivers and present landscape/seascape effects and economic contexts are ripe for research using methods such as postcode address file analyses.

In rural settlements, extant buildings and the layout of surviving features are open to further study. In many cases, there will be a wealth of subsurface settlement remains, perhaps dating back to later prehistory. The study of documentary resources will complement archaeological studies, both shedding light on the history of the development of settlements in England.

Towns and villages are generally highly influential aspects of coastal landscape and seascape character. Their wealth and great variety of historical and archaeological components demonstrate considerable time-depth and contribute strongly to their area's appearance and character. This has potential for further archaeological and historical research as well as the development of education and outreach initiatives. Education and outreach initiatives for this Character Type can be particularly popular when based within local communities, focusing on their own town or village. Towns and villages are also attractive amenity elements, being often used by the tourist industry.

CONDITION AND FORCES FOR CHANGE

Although settlements, as hubs of human activities, go through continuous change, the layouts and historic fabrics of most of them in general are relatively well preserved, shedding light about the history and development of these settlements.

As places where people live and undertake their business, settlements will always have a dynamic nature. The creation of new means of transport such as roads, railways and sea transport such as ferries is a key area for large scale developments, often changing the character of towns and their immediate surroundings.

Many coastal settlements have declined since the later 20th century due to the popularity and more assured weather conditions of foreign holidays. In addition the expansion of ports and increased development can affect the character of nearby coastal towns, turning some into 'dormitory' suburbs of larger urban areas.

Today, the decline of the commercial centres of many towns in England, as out-of-town superstores take their toll, is perceived by most people as a negative force for change, removing traditional businesses and gradually taking away the meaning from these places.

A number of towns and villages are affected severely by coastal erosion. Policy towards addressing this is the responsibility of the Environment Agency but to ensure heritage considerations are fully informed and presentable, assessment work such as fine grained HSCs can complement surveys and recording by the English Heritage Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment Surveys.

RARITY AND VULNERABILITY

Towns and villages are frequent around most of our coastline and make strong and varied contributions to the seascape and landscape. They are vulnerable to change as are all of our settlements, with particular aspects applicable to them from the economic decline of the tourist industry and the effects of coastal erosion.

Subtle aspects such as street layouts and unusual features of, for example, buildings relating to commercial, social and religious concerns, may be easily overlooked and are thereby vulnerable but important for maintaining links with settlement origins and development as well as for enhancing local distinctiveness.

In many coastal settlements, historically and architecturally important structures are often designated as Listed Buildings. Similarly nationally important archaeological features may be designated as Scheduled Monuments. Conservation Areas also exist in most towns, generally in the historic cores. Local Plans reinforce these planning controls. The Historic Environment Record (HER)/Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) for towns are gradually improving but most HERs/SMRs still need to undertake a systematic reassessment of urban archaeological remains. Some settlements will also fall within areas covered by broader designations such as Heritage Coasts, National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) .

PUBLISHED SOURCES

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WEBSITES

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