

Broad Character: Industry

Character Type: Shipping Industry

Regional Perspective: Southern England

Compiled by Seazone Solutions Ltd / M A Ltd, January 2011, after comment from D Hooley, English Heritage

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING/DISTINGUISHING ATTRIBUTES

The Southern England coastal region has a long history of boat and ship building associated with its maritime trading industry. The shipbuilding industry has diminished in the late 20th century in parts of the region but boat yards continue to repair the numerous leisure vessels.

The region's maritime trade and transport links with continental Europe are known to have developed from the Bronze Age onwards, with the English Channel being a thoroughfare for continental trade. Today, the Southern England coastal and marine region remains one of the world's busiest seaways, serving areas beyond as well as the region's ports.

HISTORICAL PROCESSES; COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND VARIABILITY

Many boatyards are in operation on the Isle of Wight and along the river banks and estuaries of the mainland coast. The Hamble River has been a centre for warship and merchant shipping construction and refurbishment since early medieval period (Hampshire County Council, 2010) and continues to support several boatyards. The area has numerous associations with famous vessels including warships such as the *Grace Dieu* (flagship of Henry V), the *Great Harry* (King Henry VIII's flagship), *HMS Elephant* (Nelson's flagship at the battle of Copenhagen), and construction of other men o'war during the 18th and 19th centuries. Some of the famous and long-established boatyards were located at Bursledon and Warsash. Here, the surrounding woodland provided an important source of timber until the later 19th century when iron and steam ship building saw the decline of wooden shipbuilding. In 1799 the construction of Bursledon bridge limited the viability of yards to the south of the crossing but they continued to build small local craft, together with small submarines and gun boats during WWII and they later supported the new yachting industry (Hampshire County Council, 2010).

Southampton's commercial and naval shipbuilding industry first developed in the Middle Ages when King Edward III's demand for a naval fleet was increased by the Hundred Years War. Southampton remained an important shipbuilding location right up to the modern period when John I. Thornycroft & Company moved there, building and repairing many ships for the Royal Navy (Rance, 1986). The company merged with Vosper & Co. in 1966 to become Vosper Thornycroft (Brown, 2004). Subsequently renamed VT Group, their Southampton yard closed in 2004 and relocated to Portsmouth which itself has a long history of shipbuilding. Portsmouth was the first naval dockyard in Britain, with the first dry-dock for warships constructed inside the dockyard in 1496. Today, the city remains home to a number of commercial shipbuilding and ship repair companies.



Portsmouth Naval Dockyard (© Hampshire & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology)

Another important centre of boat and shipbuilding in the region was Buckler's Hard in the Beaulieu estuary where wooden walled ships were built from 1698 to 1827. It was ideally suited for the role with the deep river being well sheltered and secure from coastal attack. It was also encircled with extensive woodlands, a vital source for the large amounts of wood required by the industry (Hampshire County Council, 2010). Among the ships they supervised were *HMS Euryalus* and *HMS Agamemnon* for Nelson's fleet. However, with the closure of the yard in 1818 naval repairs and ship building was concentrated in Bursledon and Portsmouth (Hampshire County Council, 2010). The village, now managed by the Beaulieu estate, is currently being restored to its eighteenth century appearance (www.bucklershard.co.uk).



Bucklers Hard in Hampshire has a long history of boat building (© English Heritage)

Ship building was also an important industry across Sussex, for example at Newhaven and Hastings, where oak from the Weald (considered to be some of the finest timber in Europe) was used for ships, together with iron from the local iron manufacturers.

The region's maritime trade and transport links with continental Europe are known to have developed from the Bronze Age with the English Channel a thoroughfare for continental trade (McGrail, 2001). By the Iron Age there was a comprehensive trading network between Britain and continental Europe and this trade increased dramatically in the Roman period (Cunliffe, 2001) with the waters around the Solent linking the continental Roman Empire with major Romano-British provincial settlements in Chichester, Southampton and Portchester Castle (directly bordering Portsmouth Harbour). Vessels would have landed in a variety of locations throughout the Solent (*Magnus Portus*) which has a number of large villas along its shores (Drummond & McInnes 2001).



Portchester Castle, Portsmouth (© Hampshire & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology)

The early medieval period is relatively sparse in direct evidence for maritime trade (MA Ltd, 2007), but from the seventh to ninth centuries the first of England's seaports were established. The large number of Anglo-Saxon towns that were also ports demonstrates the importance of continental sea trade (Friel 2003). Direct evidence for maritime transport during this period has been located in Langstone Harbour where the remains of a log boat have been excavated and recovered (www.hwtma.org.uk).



**Archaeological investigations at Langstone Harbour
(© Hampshire & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology)**

Coastal shipping played a significant role in trade around the British Isles in the medieval period. It was far cheaper and easier to move large quantities of goods by river and sea than by land. Goods for export were moved from along the coast to the larger ports and from there they were transhipped to the continent (Friel 2003: 68). In the twelfth century Southampton was almost exclusively involved in the wine trade between Gascony and England, and by the fifteenth century had expanded its links to include Italian city states, including Genoa (Wheatley 1990). These trading links are reflected in the recorded shipping losses in the Wight area with the majority being French, Italian, Portuguese and Flemish vessels as well as those of English origin. The continental trade centred in Poole harbour is similarly reflected in the documented shipping losses in the area.

By the seventeenth century England's overseas growth greatly increased, with new markets in the Baltic and the Mediterranean (Friel 2003). This period of prosperity is reflected in England's merchant fleet, which grew five times its size between 1580 and 1680, and continued to grow into the eighteenth century (MA Ltd, 2007).

The trade in goods to supply the burgeoning port of Portsmouth, and coastal trade taking goods along the south coast towards London, is reflected in both the quantity and diversity of shipwrecks in the post medieval period. The Yarmouth Roads wreck is an example of a trading vessel from this period. Located within the Solent in 1984 it is the wreck of a late 16th or early 17th century merchantman, possibly the Spanish Carrack *Santa Lucia* lost in 1567 (Watson & Gale, 1990). This wreck site is protected under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973.

Within the Wight area the Industrial Revolution played a major role in the development of ports, with Southampton and Portsmouth pre-eminent. This is also reflected in the large amount of shipping that was lost off these shores in the 19th century, the majority of which was English, reflecting the vast scale of England's merchant fleet at this period.



Shipping at Southampton, 1890 (© English Heritage)

During the Early Modern period, both the White Star and American Line chose Southampton as their transatlantic terminus for passenger liners, which resulted in an increase in shipping to the port. The cruise-liner industry remains an important industry in Southampton, with Cunard's continued use of the city as its principal British port.



Southampton Docks 1946 with Queen Mary cruise ship in the foreground (© English Heritage)

Today, the region is one of the world's busiest seaways and the volume of traffic is considerable. Within a 15 mile radius of the Channel Light Vessel (located in the English Channel at 49°55'N 2°54'W) there are around 47,000 commercial vessel movements a year. This reduces to around 19,000 per year within a 15 mile radius of the St Catherine's Lighthouse, located on the south coast of the Isle of Wight (James et al, 2010). Whilst in the Channel, shipping is monitored and controlled by the Coastguard, who have stations in the Portland, Solent and Dover areas.

VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS

The region is proud of its long history of shipbuilding. This is most clearly demonstrated at Buckler's Hard (www.bucklershard.co.uk), where warships for Nelson's Navy were built, and which is now being restored to its original appearance by the Beaulieu Estate.

Overall, shipbuilding has inspired many artists and writers. In general, the imprint that the shipbuilding industry has left on today's landscape adds a distinctiveness to the region that is highly valued by many as part of England's heritage.

The significance of the maritime heritage of the region's port cities is also well-recognised. A good example is the building of the new Sea City museum in Southampton due to be opened in 2012 which will celebrate Southampton's role as a maritime gateway to the world.

The continuing expansion of the commercial shipping industry can provoke mixed feelings in the region. It is recognised that the industry contributes greatly to the economy (local and national) and is a major employer in the region, which is welcomed by many local residents, but the pressures to create additional port facilities to accommodate that industry on relatively undeveloped land, as for example at Dibden Bay, also provokes serious opposition from many. Much commercial shipping activity remains offshore and appears physically remote from most coastal land, but the increase in larger ships lying off or entering harbours, as at Poole, has visual effects which some see as conflicting with their roles also as tourist destinations (LDA Design, 2010).

RESEARCH, AMENITY AND EDUCATION

Shipbuilding traditions have been explored as a social product (Adams 2003) which has helped to contextualise small scale shipbuilding at national and regional levels.

This Character Type also has an amenity value which links to recreational and leisure activities such as sailing. Other amenity and educational values can be seen through the range of museums and historic shipyards such as Portsmouth Historic Shipyard and the 'living museum' at Buckler's Hard where the village, Maritime Museum and historic cottage interiors are the focus for educational programmes on shipbuilding and 18th Century social and domestic life (www.bucklershard.co.uk).

In addition the study of ship building, associated infrastructure and wreck sites offers a wealth of cross-curricular opportunities incorporating science, maths, English, history and environmental studies. There are hundreds of shipwrecks in the region which are being investigated by organisations such as the Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology (HWTMA). The HWTMA has been undertaking investigations on these wrecks for nearly twenty years and continues to produce educational resources for these in the form of publications and teaching packs (www.hwtma.org.uk). The region is considered to have a high potential for marine archaeological remains due to the degree of trade occurring.

CONDITION AND FORCES FOR CHANGE

The historic shipping industry is expressed directly through its components and less directly through its imprints on the orientation and patterning of the region's infrastructure. The components include docks, basins, wrecks, wharfs, quays, jetties and slipways, warehouses and, dockworkers' cottages; and the infrastructure includes effects on the region's transport systems and settlement patterns. At certain locations, the components are now subject to conservation, preservation or refurbishment, eg at Buckler's Hard in Hampshire (www.bucklershard.co.uk). The imprint of this Character Type

has also been economic, providing employment, income and investment resources and serving the import/export needs of manufacturing industry across much of England.

Forces for change for this Character Type include the potential increase in size or type of vessel using the region's shipping routes which would result in a greater density of shipping. This could increase potential erosion from ship wash and risks of toxic contamination, as well as increased levels of noise (LDA Design, 2010).

RARITY AND VULNERABILITY

The shipbuilding industry in the Southern England region has had key roles at national and international levels. The ships constructed in the region have been integral to developing the country's international trade links as well as to its part played in historic naval warfare, for example the Mary Rose (www.maryrose.org).

From its role as containing some of the country's main trading ports, today the region's commercial shipping industry is an expanding global business, bringing economic benefits well beyond the region to the country as a whole.

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