

Broad Character: Recreation

Character Type: Recreation

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

Tourism is an important source of income and employment in the Southern England region, even being the main industry and economic mainstay of some counties such as Dorset.

There are many long established seaside resorts in the region such as Brighton, Bournemouth, Eastbourne and Worthing. These provide traditional seaside entertainment as well as more modern activities at many new leisure complexes.



Pier, promenade and gardens at Eastbourne (© Maritime Archaeology Ltd)

As well as the holiday resorts, the region's coastline attracts many visitors (local and tourists) involved in recreational activities. Such activities in the region include walking, sunbathing, and golfing. Popular water sport activities involve sea bathing, sailing, surfing, diving, leisure fishing, angling, water and jet-skiing.

Wildlife watching is also a popular pastime in the region which has a number of Nature Reserves surrounding harbours such as Pagham and Chichester as well as a designated Heritage Coast in which lies the Seven Sisters Country Park.

HISTORICAL PROCESSES; COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND VARIABILITY

The Southern England region has been renowned for its seaside resorts for over a century. One of the most well known resorts is Brighton in East Sussex. The town came to prominence during the 1740s and 1750s when Dr Richard Russell began prescribing its seawater for health benefits (Russell, 1755; Russell, 1760; Gray, 2006). By 1780 the

development of Georgian terraces had started and what was once a fishing village became a fashionable resort. The growth of the town was further encouraged by the patronage of the Prince Regent (later King George IV) after his first visit in 1783 (Carder 1990). He spent much of his leisure time in the town and constructed the Royal Pavilion during the early part of his Regency. The arrival of the railway in 1841 brought Brighton within the reach of day-trippers from London and the Victorian era saw the building of many major attractions including the Grand Hotel (1864), the West Pier (1866) and the Palace Pier (1899). Brighton remains a popular resort today and continues to develop, for example the new marina which is Europe's largest man-made yacht harbour, with moorings for more than 2000 boats, residential development and leisure facilities (www.brightonmarina.co.uk).



Brighton Royal Pavilion (© English Heritage)



Brighton Marina (© Maritime Archaeology Ltd)

Worthing is the biggest resort in West Sussex with fine gardens, five miles of seafront and a working pier. It became a resort towards end of the eighteenth century and was frequented by visitors who wanted an alternative, quieter, holiday destination to Brighton.

Bognor Regis is a classic seaside town, founded as a resort in the late eighteenth century and made famous by royal visits and the large Butlin's holiday camp. As a resort it stretches for more than 7 miles and incorporates surrounding villages from Pagham through to Middleton-on-Sea. Queen Victoria referred to it as her 'dear little Bognor' whilst her grandson King George V gave it the title 'Regis' in 1928 after recovering there from a serious illness.

Other seaside resorts in the region include towns such as Bournemouth, Eastbourne and Littlehampton, as well as many smaller villages scattered along the coastline. These resorts incorporate many of the components of this Character Type such as piers, promenades, golf courses and leisure beaches, aquariums, entertainment and amusements. In the later twentieth century British seaside resorts declined in popularity. This was due to improvements in air travel, the development of package holidays, and higher expectation of holiday makers (who chose to visit what they saw as more 'exotic' locations. British seaside towns suffered with increasing economic and social problems, and a lack of investment (Melbourne, undated). In response to this, individual resorts sought to reinvent themselves and project a sense of their unique character to attract more visitors. The recession since 2008 and an economic tightening of belts has also helped, and British seaside holidays have recently seen a resurgence.



Eastbourne seafront (© Maritime Archaeology Ltd)

There are a large number of parks and gardens in the region, as well as extensive nature reserves. The chines (coastal ravines) on the Isle of Wight and near Bournemouth are famous in the area for walking and other recreational activities. Each of the chines near Bournemouth has a public garden and marked paths leading to the beach, with the Lower Gardens and Central Gardens providing a lush green contrast to the beach and have brass

bands or orchestras playing on the bandstand in the Summer. Exbury Gardens in the New Forest is a 250 acre garden which contains more than 1000 species of rhododendron.

Nature reserves include Durlston Country Park in Dorset whose notable feature is the sea-bird colonies along the cliffs, Studland Heath National Nature Reserve, Christchurch Harbour, Pagham Harbour (a nature reserve covering more than 1000 acres and designated a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), a SPI (Special Protection Area) and a Ramsar site), Seaford Head Nature Reserve and the Seven Sisters Country Park which forms part of the Sussex Heritage Coast.



Pagham Harbour Nature Reserve (© Maritime Archaeology Ltd)

The Southern England region is a nationally significant area for leisure fishing. It takes place all along the coastline from piers, marinas and harbour walls as well as beaches (James et al, 2010). Small privately owned craft also take anglers offshore eg from Mundeford Quay to fish for species including mackerel, bass, plaice, sole and conger-eel.

Watersports are popular in the region and include recreational diving on the many wrecks of the area, water-skiing (eg off Hayling Island) and leisure sailing (the village of Hamble in Hampshire being one of the most active centres of yachting activity in Britain),



Leisure fishing and sailing on Southampton Water (© Hampshire & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology)

Holiday and theme parks are a fairly modern creation and are located near some of the main tourist resorts of the region. The most famous is Butlin's in Bognor Regis, opened in 1960. Tuckton near Christchurch is a 21 acre leisure park offers large range of amusements including a four acre 'Model Great Britain' with 200 replicas of some of the country's greatest buildings. Blackgang Chine on the Isle of Wight was supposedly named after a local band of smugglers. It opened as an amusement park in 1843, and is now a large Fantasy Theme Park which includes a maze, models of IOW houses, an Indian camp, and a series of model dinosaurs (www.blackgangchine.com)

The development of landscape heritage conservation measures in the later 20th century was applied to specifically coastal landscape too. A 'Heritage Coast' designation was initiated in 1972 to highlight the special scenic and environmental value of some stretches of coastline when development proposals are under consideration. Parts of the Sussex coastline are designated as Heritage Coast, such as that surrounding the Seven Sisters Country Park.

The newly established (2010) South Downs National Park (www.southdowns.gov.uk) and the New Forest National Park (www.newforestnpa.gov.uk) both extend to the coast in the Southern England. They offer many recreational opportunities for residents and visitors ranging from wildlife watching to walking, horse riding, cycling and watersports.

The National Trust's Nepture Coastline Campaign was set up in 1965 to save coastal locations from development and to promote public access to these areas (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-chl/w-countryside_environment/w-coastline.htm). The Trust's 'Shifting Shores' report (2005) and pamphlet highlight the importance of raising awareness of coastal issues and impacts and the critical involvement of the public in helping to manage coastal change.

The 20th century saw the rapid development of the heritage industry. Heritage attractions in the region include Bucklers Hard a former shipbuilding village which is currently being restored to its eighteenth century appearance, and Beaulieu Palace House, the home of Lord Montagu which is home to the National Motor Museum (with more than 200 historic

vehicles) and on whose land are the remains of Beaulieu Abbey which the Montagu family bought from Henry VIII on its dissolution in 1538.

VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS

The coast along Southern England provides a wide variety of recreational opportunities from bustling seaside resorts such as Brighton and Bournemouth to the quieter nature reserves of the Seven Sisters Country Park and Pagham Harbour Nature Reserve. These cater for different audiences and are appreciated by many. Individual sporting activities such as diving, water-skiing and leisure fishing are also appreciated along the coastline.

The value of coastal recreation and water related activities has a number of positive outcomes, including health benefits, social inclusion and quality of life, environmental protection and economic benefits (Church 2008). For example, recreational activities such as swimming, rowing, canoeing, dinghy sailing and other activities that require sustained physical exertion are highly beneficial to achieve a healthy lifestyle.

This Character Type causes pronounced conflicting feelings. Some people dislike recreation sites because they are seen as blots on the landscape as well as the physical manifestations of the annual invasion of tourists bringing cars and noise to the region. In contrast, other people perceive recreation sites as representing a mainstay of the region's economy and offering long term security.

Within this Character Type, the development of recreational facilities (eg new marina developments, caravan parks, expansion of seaside resorts) often leads to pressures on earlier features in the region and highlight the needs to manage such change with care. For example, the creation of golf courses and caravan parks involve dismantling of existing landscape features and the creation of new ones. Furthermore, constraints on development initiatives in the region are beginning to exert control on the locations and forms of recreation complexes.

RESEARCH, AMENITY AND EDUCATION

Tourism has had a profound impact on the region's recent economy, infrastructure and social structure. Further research on this Character Type might focus on understanding the history of tourism at a regional level, understanding the local and regional historic environment to better inform future developments and developing tools to enable the prediction of tourism impacts with established mitigation measures. Although this Character Type is enjoyed in many differing ways an amenity for large numbers of people, the high densities of visitors and associated development, noise and visual impacts in certain areas are also seen by some as reducing the amenity value of the region's coastline.

Many of the seaside resorts have museums dedicated to the local heritage of the area eg Brighton Fishing Museum which traces the story of the fishing community in the town. Hastings Fishermen's Museum is one of the town's most popular tourist attractions and attracts over 140,000 people every year (www.brightonfishingmuseum.org.uk/). Education centres have also been set up in many of the Nature Reserves at eg Chichester Harbour and the Seven Sisters Country Park.



The Stade, Hastings, home to the Fishermen's Museum (© Maritime Archaeology Ltd)

Further work on the unique elements of individual resorts and the coastal landscape could lead to an increase in their tourism potential.

CONDITION AND FORCES FOR CHANGE

With the recession since 2008 and an economic tightening of belts, British seaside holidays have seen a resurgence and tourism has risen again in Southern England. Together with individual activities such as diving, leisure fishing and other watersports that people pay to take part in, this represents an increased source of income and employment for the region.

Some of the recreation facilities along Southern England coast are designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), RAMSAR sites and Heritage Coast and are therefore offered some protection. Other areas are regulated by eg harbour authorities and local council authorities.

The seaside resorts of the region continue to expand and develop, for example the new marina at Brighton which is Europe's largest man-made yacht harbour, with moorings for more than 2000 boats, residential development and leisure facilities (www.brightonmarina.co.uk).

Often, the construction of caravan and holiday/theme parks in the region removes earlier historical features on the regional landscape/seascape. Golf courses may retain some fragments of field systems or ancient woodlands in their landscaping, although these features are often fragmented.

There are also issues concerning the increasing number of tourists to the area. For example, Hengistbury Head is visited by more than 1 million people a year, posing an increasing threat to land, wildlife and archaeological sites. As a result, visitors are now being restricted to certain routes.

RARITY AND VULNERABILITY

The decline in popularity of British holiday resorts in the later twentieth century resulted in many seaside towns suffering increasing economic and social problems. However, there has recently been a resurgence in British seaside holidays, in part due to the recent recession, and such towns have seen increased investment and improvement in their economy, infrastructure and attractiveness to holiday makers.

Public access to the coastline for recreational purposes has been improved by the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. The Act clarifies, simplifies and extends access through the creation of a coastal access corridor to which the public has right of access on foot (www.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/legislation/index.htm).

The National Trust's 'Shifting Shores' report highlights the importance of raising awareness of coastal issues and impacts and the critical involvement of the public in helping to manage coastal change.

Diving clubs that dive on unknown wrecks could potentially provide local archaeologists and historians with a wealth of new and valuable information on these sites. Encouraging collaboration between local divers, archaeologists and historians would provide opportunities to continue developing general public awareness.

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