

Broad Character: Settlement

Character Type: Settlement

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 coastal area of the Southern England region is densely populated. It includes a variety of coastal settlement types including major cities such as Southampton and Portsmouth, tourist resorts such as Brighton, Worthing, Eastbourne and Bognor Regis and smaller fishing towns and villages including Lymington, Bosham and Emsworth amongst others.



Bosham village (© Maritime Archaeology Ltd)

HISTORICAL PROCESSES; COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND VARIABILITY

The Southern England region has a long history of human settlement. The earliest human remains from the British Isles have been recovered from Boxgrove on the West Sussex Coastal Plain and have been dated to c500,000 BC. Environmental evidence has indicated a wet grassland and shrub habitat on the site which would have provided an open area of good grazing (matt.pope.users.btopenworld.com/boxgrove/boxhome.htm)

At Southampton remains dating from the Pleistocene period have also been found, as well as artefacts dating from the Mesolithic, Neolithic through to the Iron Age (www.southampton.gov.uk). Clausentum, the Roman settlement of Southampton was founded soon after the invasion of AD 43 and became an important port. Trading links increased from the middle Saxon period (c.700-850) with finds of pottery, glass, coins, stone and metalwork pointing to connections with Scandinavia, France, the Low Countries and the Rhineland. After the Norman conquest the town developed into one of the most important ports in medieval England (www.southampton.gov.uk). Wealthy merchants continued to live in the town, and during the late 17th and 18th centuries Southampton enjoyed brief popularity as a spa resort for the upper classes. The modern

port of Southampton was founded in 1838, and by the end of the 19th century and into the early 20th, the great liners had made Southampton their home. The town was recognised as the "Gateway to the Empire", and one of the busiest ports in the country (www.southampton.gov.uk). Despite heavy bombing during WWII, Southampton still retains many of its old buildings, including the sixteenth century Tudor House, the Norman Bargate and the towers and extensive lengths of the medieval town walls. Southampton continues to be an international seaport and home to the Atlantic liners of the Cunard Company. The new Sea City Museum, to open in 2012, will feature two permanent exhibitions focussing on Southampton's 'Titanic story' and the city's role as a maritime gateway to the world.



The modern docks at Southampton
(© Hampshire & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology)

Portsmouth has served as a major naval port for many centuries. It was granted a charter by Richard I in 1194, and established as a naval dockyard during reign of Henry VII. Portsmouth is home to many famous ships, including *HMS Warrior* and Lord Nelson's flagship *HMS Victory*. Although smaller than in its heyday, the naval base remains a major dockyard and base for the Royal Navy and Royal Marine Commandos. There is also a thriving commercial ferryport serving destinations on the continent for freight and passenger traffic.



Portsmouth Harbour, Naval Dockyard and Historic Dockyard (© Hampshire & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology)

Across the region as a whole, the rapid growth of the coastal population started in the mid nineteenth century with the development of resort towns, and has continued until the present day with the influx of migrants from many parts of the UK seeking retirement homes (Isle of Wight Centre for the Coastal Environment, 2006).

The region contains a number of coastal towns that developed into popular holiday destinations from the 18th-20th centuries. After an economic decline affecting many of the region's seaside resorts in the later 20th century, several are experiencing regeneration in various roles in the early years of the 21st century. Brighton emerged as a fashionable health resort during the 18th century. 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). More recently, gentrification of much of Brighton has seen a return of a modern equivalent of the fashionable image which characterised its growth in the Regency period (Carder, 1990).



Traditional town house in Brighton (© Maritime Archaeology Ltd)



New development at Brighton Marina (© Maritime Archaeology Ltd)

Other coastal towns include Worthing, Bognor Regis and Eastbourne. Worthing is the biggest resort in West Sussex with five miles of seafront and a working pier. It became a resort towards end of the 18th century and was frequented by visitors who wanted an alternative, quieter, holiday destination to Brighton. Bognor Regis was also founded as a

resort in the late eighteenth century and made famous by royal visits. In the mid-later 20th century it was also home to a large Butlins 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 little Bognor' whilst her grandson King George V gave it the title 'Regis' in 1928 after recovering there from a serious illness. Eastbourne remained a small settlement until the 19th century when its four hamlets gradually merged to form a town (Wright, 1902). Assisted by the arrival of the railway in 1849, Eastbourne became a prime Victorian seaside resort and remains so today. In the 1990s, the town's growth accelerated rapidly as a new plan was launched to develop the area known as the Crumbles, a shingle bank on the coast to the east of the town centre. This area, now known as Sovereign Harbour, contains a marina, shops, and several thousand houses, along with luxury flats and apartments, and was formerly home to many rare plants, causing much controversy when the development was first proposed.



Eastbourne (© Maritime Archaeology Ltd)

In historical terms, Hastings can claim fame through its historical association with the Norman Conquest and its role as one of the medieval Cinque Ports. Hastings was, for centuries, an important fishing port; although much reduced, it still has the largest beach-based fishing fleet in England.



Hastings (© Maritime Archaeology Ltd)

Bucklers Hard, part of the Beaulieu estate, is a shipbuilding village that was originally planned by the 2nd Duke of Montagu as a base, 'Montagu Town', for the import of sugar from the islands of St Vincent and St Lucia in the West Indies. In the event, the French seized the islands and the village became a shipbuilding community. The village consists of two lines of cottages leading down to the beach where, from 1698 to 1827, wooden-walled ships were built. For almost a century, wood was under the control of the family and descendants of the master builder Henry Adams. Among the ships they supervised were *HMS Euryalus* and *HMS Agamemnon* for Nelson's fleet.

The South Coast is also known for its yachting centres such as Lymington which has three marinas. It is famous for its sailing history, and in recent years has been home to numerous world regattas.

VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS

Coastal settlements are where most people in the coastal region live and base their visits. As such, they are where most develop their coastal perceptions. Those perceptions of coastal settlements in Southern England vary with the size and character of the individual city, town or village. Some see the larger port cities as places of economic growth that support many local jobs and provide local income, contrasting with 'more tranquil' smaller fishing villages (which also provide some local employment) and the coastal resorts as areas of entertainment and holiday destinations.

Coastal settlements are largely not populated by people who make their living directly from the sea. The later 20th century saw an influx of migrants from many parts of the UK seeking retirement homes and (more recently) employment opportunities (Isle of Wight Centre for the Coastal Environment, 2006). Newly developed marina areas of coastal towns (eg at Southampton and Brighton) have provided a new type of living next to the coast. These can be very expensive and seen as overt expressions of luxury living as Sandbanks, a small peninsula crossing the mouth of Poole Harbour which is well-known for the highly-regarded Sandbanks Beach and its very high property values; Sandbanks has, by area, the fourth highest land value in the world (BBC news website, April 2005).

From their early days as tourist resorts in the 19th century, certain coastal settlements such as Eastbourne, and Worthing continue to be perceived as holiday destinations. With the economic recession and tightening of belts since 2008, British seaside holidays have seen some resurgence. In the summer months the resident population in these towns almost doubles due to the influx of tourists.

The West Sussex coast is almost continuously developed and forms part of what has been called the South Coast Conurbation (Isle of Wight Centre for the Coastal Environment, 2006). Growth, initially centred on the old-established cities of Southampton and Portsmouth, has converted the littoral zone of the northeast Solent into one of the most urbanised sections of the British coast (Isle of Wight Centre for the Coastal Environment, 2006).

RESEARCH, AMENITY AND EDUCATION

Many of the coastal towns and villages of the region are important elements of the tourist industry, containing many historical features (e.g. churches, castles and bridges) which attract and are displayed to visitors.

There is, however, considerable further potential for outreach and public awareness initiatives embracing the historic character that lends distinctiveness to the region's coastal towns. This can engage with the towns' inhabitants, particularly children, increasing peoples' awareness of the historical contexts of their own homes as well as raising the understanding of the tourists. In the case of port cities such as Southampton tourists include the large number of people embarking from the cruise ships or those visiting for the day from the continent (via many ferry services along the south coast).

Many coastal settlements already have maritime museums eg at Seaford and Hastings, and the importance of raising public understanding of the region's extensive maritime heritage has been recognised by Southampton City Council in the development of the new Sea City Museum (to open in 2012). It is estimated to be costing £15million and is planned to be a centrepiece of the new Cultural Quarter of the city. The Museum will feature two permanent exhibitions focussing on Southampton's Titanic story and the city's role as a maritime gateway to the world. It will also showcase the city's impressive archaeological and maritime collections.

There is also considerable scope for awareness-raising about the issues of coastal erosion as experienced by settlements within the region such as Selsey, placing these issues in their historical context.

CONDITION AND FORCES FOR CHANGE

The settlements of the region have come under attack from many forces (cultural and natural) over the years.

The major cities of the Southern England coastal region were some of the main targets during and after the Battle of Britain, the air campaign waged by the German Air Force (Luftwaffe) against the United Kingdom during the summer and autumn of 1940. Portsmouth's status as a major naval base and civilian port were key factors in the Luftwaffe's decision to bomb it extensively, with many houses and the Guildhall destroyed. While most of the city has since been rebuilt, developers still occasionally find unexploded bombs. Southampton was also heavily bombed.

The character of coastal towns is constantly evolving to meet new demands, as with the construction of new housing, often as estates, along with central and out-of-town shopping areas.

Certain settlements within the region are vulnerable to, and severely affected by coastal erosion. It is ever-present in Selsey, West Sussex, where the coastline has been receding for hundreds of years. Beyond Selsey, there are many lost villages and settlements all along the Sussex coast, including Barpham south of Angmering; Kingston Church; parts of old Middleton-on-Sea and Clymping (www.westsussex.info/selsey-flood-defences.shtml).

RARITY AND VULNERABILITY

Towns and villages are key components of the landscape and seascape, with a considerable time-depth of human activity which has contributed hugely to the distinctive appearance and character of the Southern England coastline.

The region's cultural and natural environment are overall highly protected by local, national and international designations (Isle of Wight Centre for the Coastal Environment 2006).

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