

Introduction

The Wash is a large muddy inlet beset by drying banks and fast swirling tides.

Most yachtsmen and motorboaters pass it by as quickly as they can on their way north or south, with little inclination or reason to test their pilotage venturing within.

For those prepared to make the effort, there are decent facilities for yachts and boats available on the River Nene at Wisbech and a small marina below Sutton Bridge. At Wisbech apart from pontoon moorings where you lay afloat, all the facilities of a medium-sized town are right on hand. Mooring prices are very reasonable too. Sutton Bridge also has a good supply of shops and retail outlets available and their tariffs are equally reasonable.

The problem is that a determined effort will be needed to reach Wisbech. Unless you have an extremely fast vessel the journey inwards to Wisbech is going to be a two-stage affair. It used to be that one would work ones way in to anchor somewhere outside the River Nene and await the last three hours of the next flood to navigate the Nene to Wisbech. The construction of a new marina below Sutton Bridge should change that because it will be possible to come into the Wash on the flood and make it to Sutton Bridge by HW slack, spend an evening ashore in pleasant surroundings and make your way through the bridge to Wisbech the next day. If you wish there are still reasonably sheltered anchorages and even temporary moorings in the entrance to the Wisbech Channel (protected somewhat by the drying banks) if you prefer birds and mudbanks to beer and skittles!

It would not be a good idea to consider approaching Wisbech (or anywhere else deep in The Wash) with strong winds from the north-east, as you will find yourself trapped and embayed with numerous drying banks to Leewards. Gloomy warnings apart, in normal weather from the South West or Northwest and especially in light summer conditions there should be no problems other than the usual navigational ones.

Approach

Entry to The Wash is straightforward and well marked. If heading for the River....

.....Nene the first stage is to locate and identify the Roaring Middle light afloat. This red-and-white structure is lit LFI.10s7m8M, and has plenty of deep water all round

Wisbech harbour website shows their latest approach channel at [River Nene Passage Plan January 2021.pdf \(sailthewash.com\)](http://www.sailthewash.com/River_Nene_Passage_Plan_January_2021.pdf)

Unless conditions are exceptionally calm and clear you are unlikely to see your next Mark from the Roaring Middle Light Float...

A generally south westerly course from here will bring you to the red-and-white Nene Roads buoy (Mo A 6s). That has been moved to 52° 53.85N 000° 15.51 E Care will be needed not to stray to port as the Roaring Middle Sandbanks lurk to the SE. They do dry and are marked by a couple of red can buoys (both now lit) which you can leave well to port. Have a care because these two red can buoys are now in the wrong position on some older Navionics and Imray charts. Using anything but this years charts (paper and your plotters) will lead to confusion in good visibility, let alone bad.

From Nene Roads buoy continuing on your south westerly course will bring you to the Wisbech Channel, which is well marked and lit, starting with the East Knock ECM followed by the green conical buoy Wisbech No.1. There is less water in this area with a minimum depths on the direct line of 1.5 m at CD and you need to positively identify the PHM "Bob" and be sure to leave it to port before turning towards the gap between the No 3 SHM and the Fenland PHM - don't cut the corner because it's narrow and 'ere be dragons; once past the above-mentioned green

buoy the water deepens again.

From here you follow the Lateral marks and cardinal marks into the Nene channel
Further Pilotage Directions...

In general you will be looking at around three hours before high water before you can make your move across the shallows and into the River Nene. Once past the ECM East Knock(VQ (3)5s) the channel is twisting narrow and torturous, although it is well buoyed and lit. Carefully following this buoyage, and noting the Cardinal buoys shown on the chart (in addition to the local buoyage), you will arrive at the entrance to the Nene. The green conical Big Annie (Oc.G.3s) and the red post Big Tom (Fl(2)R.10s) mark the entrance. Continuing straight onwards and will bring you into the canalised River which is basically straight and easy to follow. Ships may be encountered and the listening watch on channel 9 should be kept.

SUTTON BRIDGE OPERATION.. from April 2016 this bridge will NOT be on 24 call. See comments section at bottom

Basically you must **call them the day before** on the landline/mobile to ascertain that they can swing the bridge for you and call them again in the middle of the Wash to confirm on passage.

Sutton Bridge which lies about 3 miles into the River is the main road crossing for the A17. It **no longer** constantly manned so, unless you have booked with them 24 hours in advance you may be met with a deathly 'ush if you call them on #9. The telephone number for the Bridge Keeper is 01406 350364 or mob 07788931616. If you intend stopping at the new facilities below Sutton Bridge you should contact them on 01945 588059 (Wisbech Yacht Harbour.)

Passage through the Bridge is controlled by traffic signals, red amber and green. Be aware that this can be a bit of a busy area and that the tides can run quite hard here. Just downstream of the Bridge on your starboard side are the pilots pontoon moorings (which will be replaced by the marina pontoons), and if you had to wait temporarily for a bridge opening or a passing ship these are an option (with 1.5 m even at LWS).

The port rules are that you can only wait at Cross Keys (Sutton Bridge) for 12 hours and you cannot stay onboard there overnight so you need to make arrangements for the bridge swing at the planning stag, especially if you are looking to pass the bridge an hour or so before HW Wisbech at lunchtime because the next tide is in the middle of the night.

Once you have passed the Bridge the canalised River makes it's way a further 7 miles odd to Wisbech. The riverbanks are shallow and there is nowhere really to stop.

Berthing

Once in the River Nene and given the restrictions imposed by the tide (a good 4kts on a spring ebb).....

..... you have two choices; stop below Sutton Bridge at the new Nene Marina or to transit the bridge and continue up to Wisbech Yacht Harbour'

Crosskeys Marina (Sutton Bridge)

The projected Marina below Sutton Bridge is now (2017) complete and will be run by the Lincolnshire County Council on a day to day basis by the people up at Wisbech. If you are considering this as an option to wait for the tide/bridge you should contact Wisbech Yacht Harbour (details below). They have one berth set aside for boats to wait for the next tide ie wait limited to 12 hours; they do not allow boats to be occupied overnight.

Wisbech Yacht Harbour

In the approaches to Wisbech Town, you will first encounter the commercial quays on the eastern banks of the River. Coasters of up to 2000 tonnes are handled here.

The Yacht Harbour will be found deeper into the town, just before you reach the fixed bridge. The pontoon berths here have a minimum of 2.5 m depth. You should normally be arriving here on the flood at or about high water slack so you run very little risk of drifting under the bridge up river of the pontoons whilst you turn round but should you have arrived with a strongish flood have a chat with the harbour about where to turn; there's a wider bit in the channel just before you get to the pontoons and it's best to turn there and drift astern with the tide. You don't have the option of putting the nose into the banks opposite the pontoons - that's all shuttering!

It was found that the river flow is still INWARDS for a good hour and a half after HW which complicates matters if arriving at HW

Contact the Marina on VHF channel 9, or telephone 01945 588059 during office hours.
Out of hours Telephone Number (07860) 576685. A link to their website is provided below:

<http://www.fenland.gov.uk/wisbechyachtharbour>

Otherwise simply use a vacant outside berth temporarily.

Costs here work out at a very reasonable £2.20 per metre per day for visitors with a minimum charge of £11.40. Shore power is by prepaid card, showers free.

Updated March 2021

Facilities

All the normal Marina facilities are available at both locations with water and electricity on the pontoons. Wisbech has CCTV security, and showers and toilets ashore.

Diesel and chandlery are available, and at Wisbech a recently installed 75 tonne travel lift can cope with most boats....

Public transport is not that brilliant, but there are regular bus connections with Peterborough, Huntingdon, Northampton, and Cambridge.

What To Do

The mariner will find plenty of places to eat and drink at both Sutton Bridge and Wisbech though, unlike Wells, do not expect these towns to have a salty feel to them; in fact you are well inland. You will however find the usual Indian and Chinese restaurants, together with many other types.

A couple of links are provided below for your further investigation:

Pubs in Wisbech

<http://www.beerinevening.com/pubs/results.shtml/el/Wisbech%3BCambridgeshire/>

Eating Out in Wisbech

[Restaurants & Places to Eat in Wisbech - Tripadvisor](#)

Sutton Bridge is less well endowed but there are several pubs/hotels which do food and there is a chippie and a Chinese take-away

History

During the Iron Age, the area where Wisbech would develop lay in the west of the Celtic Iceni tribe's territory. The town lies at the centre of a group of villages which contain the word "walk" from the Saxon for "foreigner". This provides evidence that during this period, the local population was Romano British (Celtic).

Wisbech Castle was built in 1086 by William I to fortify the town, and in later Tudor times became a notorious prison. Among those held there were John Feckenham, last Abbot of Westminster and two of the key participants in the Gunpowder Plot, Robert Catesby and Francis Tresham. The castle was rebuilt in the mid-17th century and again in 1816 by Joseph Medworth, who also developed The Crescent, familiar as the setting in numerous costume dramas.

The major town dwelling is Peckover House with its fine walled garden, built for the Quaker banking family in 1722 and now owned by the National Trust.

In the 17th century, the local inhabitants became known as the "Fen Tigers" because of their resistance to the draining of the fens, but the project turned Wisbech into a wealthy port handling agricultural produce. At this time Wisbech was on the estuary of the River Ouse, but silting caused the coastline to move north, and the River Nene was diverted to serve the town. The Wisbech Canal joining the River Nene at Wisbech was subsequently filled in and became the dual carriageway leading into the town from the east (now crossing the bypass).

The 5 mile (8 kilometre) £6 million A47 Wisbech/West Walton Bypass opened in spring 1982.

Railways

Wisbech once had three railway branch lines: the 1847/1848 - 1968 GER March to Watlington (junction), Norfolk (on the Ely to King's Lynn main line) via Wisbech East (Victoria Road); the 1866 - 1959 M&GN Peterborough to Sutton Bridge via Wisbech North (on Harecroft Road); and the 1883/1884 - 1966 GER Wisbech and Upwell Tramway. Also, there were two harbour quay lines either side of the River Nene - M&GN Harbour West branch and GER Harbour East branch.

The Wisbech and March Bramleyline heritage railway are going to fully restore and re-open the remaining March to Wisbech line as a tourist line similar to the Mid-Norfolk Railway at Dereham.

As the Wisbech branch is Network Rail property and is still classed as a fully functioning goods line, although the last goods service was in Summer 2000, the Bramleyline Heritage Railway will lease the track from NR on an 99-year lease. Train services, once the line has been fully re-opened following HM Rail Inspectorate approval, will run between March North (a new station adjacent to Elm Road crossing, March) and Wisbech East (a new station on Newbridge Lane, Wisbech). At Coldham, a new station is hoped to be built on the site of the old station's Down (Wisbech bound) platform.

Culture

The Angles Theatre is a thriving professional theatre, run almost entirely by volunteers and backed by many leading names including Derek Jacobi, Jo Brand and Cameron Mackintosh. It is also the home of the "Nine Lives" theatre company, a company formed as part of Performing Arts programme run by the Isle College.

The amateur dramatic group The Wisbech Players has been performing for over 50 years. They currently perform twice a year in spring and autumn at the Angles Theatre.

Amateur dramatic group The Wisbech Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society (WAODS) have been providing musicals to the town since 1905 and a yearly pantomime since 1975. The society's home is at the local Thomas Clarkson Community College, where rehearsals and performances take place.

Every summer a "Rose Fair" is held in St Peter's Church. The church is decorated with floral displays sponsored by local organisations and businesses. A parade of floats forms up in Queens Road and circuits the town. Strawberry and cream teas are served and stalls raise funds for local charities. Coaches bring visitors from a wide area. Details are available from the local tourist office.

Wisbech is twinned with Arles in France.

Local youth organisations include the Army Cadet Force, Air Training Corps, Sea Cadets, Girls Venture Corps Air Cadets, Fire cadets and St John Ambulance cadets. There are numerous Scouting groups for boys and girls.

Elgood's Brewery; The brewery was founded in 1795, and bought soon after by the Elgood family. It is a traditional brewery, but produces less than some modern micro-breweries, with output at around 90-100 barrels per week. The beers produced include: "Black Dog Mild", "Golden Newt", "Cambridge Bitter", "Greyhound Strong Bitter", "Old Smoothie Mild", "Old Smoothie Bitter", "Brookes Ale", "Reinbeer" and "Jingle Ale". Recently the brewery has won the Champion Beer of Britain award for its Cambridge Bitter. The brewery is also known for its gardens, which are open to the public.

According to a study looking into immigration patterns, Wisbech was once identified as the seventh "most English" town in Britain. Sky News However, on 16 February 2008 a report in the Daily Express titled "Death Of A Country Idyll" wrote about how the influx of Eastern European immigrants may have caused the increase of crime and other illegal activities. Then on 20 February 2008 The Fenland Citizen contained an article opposing the Daily Express article.

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