

Introduction

I must confess a certain fondness for Swanage. My first visit was

..... many years ago in a hulking MFV in which we had sailed non-stop from Liverpool. A problem had developed with the battery charging, and we put into Swanage to sort it out in relative peace. We arrived after dark and were looking for somewhere to anchor but were getting confused seeing navigational lights where they were not supposed to be..... turned out to be a floating disco boat!

Well that about set the tone and we got waylaid, spending a few days alongside the pier and also exploring Studland and Poole....

Swanage can be a useful anchorage if you are heading West and tide or wind do not serve, with protection from NNW through to SSW. The holding ground is a bit indifferent further out, but smaller boats can nose in close.

If easterlies come up and you don't plan to take advantage of them (or strong winds from any direction) it is always possible to bolt into Poole.

Swanage is "Tarrydiddle Town", and if you approach by car and are familiar with Enid Blyton's children's stories you will recognise it as such. I remember reading in a newspaper article that I wasn't imagining this, she really did base Tarrydiddle Town on Swanage, and that many adventures of the Famous Five were based in this general area. All this will probably mean little to you unless you used to read these stories to your own children in less politically correct times.

Approach

If coming to Swanage from the South give the red can buoy marking....

..... Peveril Ledge a good offing on your port side. There is a tide rip that extends well East of this buoy on the ebb.

Approach from the East is straightforward, and if you're coming from the North give Handfast Point and the Old Harry Rocks a wide berth. Both these dangers are well charted.

Locate the pier, and find your anchorage to the North of it.

Berthing

Anchor clear of the pier to suit draft.

(There is now an exclusion zone around the pier - presumably so that you can't be blamed if some idiot jumps off the pier and cracks his skull open on your transom!) The holding ground is not brilliant and you will need to dig your anchor in well. In fact it may need more than one attempt.

There is no great rise and fall of the tide but the stream eddies around the bay so you will swing. If anchored in a larger vessel and not too close in it would probably be unwise to leave your vessel unattended unless you can see it. For those determined to linger awhile deploying two anchors in such a way that neither of them has to break out whichever way the vessel swings will give peace of mind.

The smaller boats can nose right in close past the moorings for an altogether more peaceful berth, although it would be very wise to buoy your anchor as the bottom can be foul (I know this from experience).

Although not recommended for yachts, a larger boat with suitable fendering and having obtained permission from the pier master can lie alongside his pier, probably on the South side. This can only be considered in offshore winds. The pier master can be found in his office at the root of the pier, and he will only charge modestly (£10 per day). I seem to remember water being available here too (confirmed 2014)

Dinghy landings can be made close either side of the pier on the beach or slip.

Facilities

Not much for the boat, but the town can provide reasonable provisioning, and banks with cashpoints. The pier already mentioned is pretty much a focal point around the bay, and a link to their website is below:

<http://www.swanagepiertrust.com>

Much diving activity takes place around the pier, and the Swanage Sailing Club is close by the root of the pier, link to website below:

<http://www.swanagesailingclub.org.uk/>

The concrete slipway at Swanage (near the lifeboat station) is accessible all states of the tide.

Although Swanage has a railway station it is of the scenic variety and at present is no good for transport links. Steam trains and historic diesels ply from here. Buses can be had to Wareham and Poole, where train connections can be made. In summer a ferry runs from the pier to Poole and back.

What To Do

A wide range of pubs and restaurants are available in Swanage, and young people will find plenty to do ashore on a summer's night. Unfortunately you will be stuck on your boat guarding that it doesn't drag ! If you are lucky enough to have enough crew to take it in turns or are confident enough to abandon your pride and joy at anchor, a couple of links are provided below to give you some ideas:

Pubs:

<http://www.beerintheevening.com/pubs/results.shtml/el/Swanage%3BDorset/>

Eating Out:

[Restaurants & Places to Eat in Swanage 2021 - Tripadvisor](#)

History

While fishing is likely the town's oldest industry, quarrying has been important to the town and the local area since

at least the 1st century AD. During the time of the Roman occupation this industry grew, with the distinctive Purbeck marble being used for decorative purposes in buildings as far away as London. When the Romans left Britain, quarrying largely ceased until the 12th century.

The town is first mentioned in historical texts in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of 877AD. It is stated as being the scene of a great naval victory by King Alfred over the Danes: "This year came the Danish army into Exeter from Wareham; whilst the navy sailed west about, until they met with a great mist at sea, and there perished one hundred and twenty ships at Swanwich." A hundred Danish ships which had survived the battle were driven by a storm onto Peveril Point, a shallow rocky reef outcropping from the southern end of Swanage bay. A monument topped (historically incorrectly) by cannon balls was built in 1882 by John Mowlem to celebrate this event and is situated at the southern end of the seafront promenade.

In the 12th century demand for Purbeck marble grew once again. While Purbeck marble is not suited to external use, as it does not weather well, it is however strong and suitably decorative for use as internal columns. As such the stone was used in the construction of many large churches and cathedrals being built at the time.

In contrast to the decorative Purbeck marble, Purbeck limestone, or more commonly 'Purbeck stone', has been used in construction locally since the early days of quarrying in Purbeck. Its use is less well documented as it was taken for granted as the default construction materials in the area. However, the arrival of more modern quarrying techniques in the 17th century resulted in an increase in production. The Great Fire of London in 1666 led to a period of large scale reconstruction in the city, and Purbeck stone was extensively used for paving. It was in this time that stone first started being loaded upon ships directly from the Swanage seafront; before this time quarried stone had been first transported to Poole for shipping.

The idea that Swanage could become a tourist destination was first encouraged by a local MP William Morton Pitt in the early 19th century, who converted a mansion in the town into a luxury hotel. The hotel is noted for having been visited in 1833 by the (then) Princess Victoria, later to become queen. The building was later renamed the Royal Victoria Hotel, now the building has been converted into flats and a bar and nightclub in the left and right wings respectively.

Mowlem and Burt - The Victorian era

The town's greatest prominence came during the Victorian period. John Mowlem (1788-1868), a Swanage man, became a successful builder in London, creating the Mowlem construction company, which still existed as recently as 2006, when it was acquired by another company.

John Mowlem made his business in London by importing stone into the city from around the country, including Purbeck limestone. Through this process, many relics and monuments were brought from London to Swanage in the nineteenth century by Mowlem and his nephew George Burt (1816-1894) who took over the business when Mowlem retired. It is said that these items brought from London were used as ballast for the empty vessels which transported the Purbeck stone to London.

Railway was introduced to the town in 1885 with the encouragement of George Burt by the London and South Western Railway Company. By this time the town was becoming a popular resort destination for the wealthy, noted for its fine weather and clean air. The town previously had been fairly cut off due to its valley location, but the introduction of the railway made the town much more accessible to visitors, with direct services running from London. However the greatest increase in visitors came with the building of the second 'new' pier in 1895, built primarily for use by pleasure steamers.

The Wars Years To Today

The town enjoyed several decades quietly being successful as a seaside resort. The First World War left few physical marks on the town, however during the Second gun emplacements and pillboxes were built at spots along the shoreline at the southern end of the bay. The town also received bomb damage during the Second World War, with 20 people killed. The town and other nearby villages are noted for playing a part in the development of radar.

After the Second World War the town like many other seaside resorts and indeed the country at large, suffered a recession with few people able to spare the money for holidaying. In 1972 the Swanage branch line of the railway was closed by British rail as part of larger network-wide cutbacks. Fortunately a group of local enthusiasts formed a charitable organisation with the purpose of restoring and preserving the branch line and steam and diesel locomotives to run along it, forming the Swanage Railway.

Through the years Swanage had suffered from flooding, with severe flooding occurring as recently as 1990. In 1993 a largescale flood alleviation scheme was completed, ending in the banjo shaped 'new jetty' outletting rainwater. This in itself created a new problem, disturbing the natural northward drift of sand up the bay, with a buildup on the southern side and reduction of sand on the northern. This reduction of sand levels exposed the foundations of parts of the seawall threatening to damage it. As a result the beach was improved in 2005/6 by construction of new greenheart timber groynes and the placement of 90,000m³ of sand as beach nourishment.

Tourism

During the peak summer season many people are drawn by the town's beautiful setting, the beach and other attractions. The town has a large number of hotels and guest rooms though the number (particularly of hotels) has reduced slightly in recent years. Swanage has a gently sloping white sand beach which is sheltered and generally calm. The beach is well served by local businesses providing refreshments and services. For example, there are ice cream outlets, fish restaurants, 'Chip Shops' and cafes. For hire are deck chairs, boats, pedalos and general watersports equipment. There are amusement arcades and parks.

Besides the beach, other attractions including the restored Swanage steam railway and the Victorian pier. The town may also be used a base from which to visit other nearby areas of interest, such as Corfe Castle.

Festivals And Events

The town hosts a number of annual festivals and events. In the summer months there is a carnival week which includes a procession of floats and dancers and several firework displays, and many other attractions and small events including live music from local bands, races and a regatta.

The railway has special Thomas The Tank Engine themed events and other special services.

The town also hosts successful festivals, drawing people from far and wide, including a Jazz Festival, a Folk Festival, a Blues Festival, and there a plans for a Food Festival in the future.

New Years Eve has traditionally been a big event for Swanage, with the town drawing more people from surrounding areas, and people travelling considerable distances to attend. This was in part thanks to employees of the nearby Wytch Farm oil processing facility. While the popularity of the event has waned somewhat from its peak in the early 1990s, with fewer oil employees in the area, there is still a large gathering each year, spilling out into the square and high street at midnight.

Transport

Swanage station, the terminus of the Swanage heritage railway. The main road into Swanage is the A351 which passes through Corfe Castle and to Wareham, and onto the main road A35 to Poole and Bournemouth.

There are bus services provided by Wilts & Dorset, the numbers 40 and 44 which run between Swanage and Poole, and the number 50 which runs between Swanage and Bournemouth via the chain ferry at Sandbanks to Studland.

Swanage has a heritage restored steam railway which operates for part of the year, though at the moment this only goes as far as Norden. Recent developments on the railway have seen the physical connection between the Swanage Railway and the mainline restored, but the safety and operational considerations, including the purchasing of suitable rolling stock, are still in planning stages. It is hoped to eventually run services allowing passengers make connections at the mainline station at Wareham.

There are also limited ferry services between Poole Quay and Swanage Pier. These are used by Swanage people for shopping trips to Poole's large shopping centre, and also by tourists in Poole for daytrips into Swanage.