

Introduction

Whitstable is a drying harbour turned over to commercial and fishing use only.

It lies between the Eastern entrance to the River (Ria) Swale and Herne Bay, under the control of the Canterbury City Council with a local harbourmaster in residence. Small coasters use it shifting aggregates and timber, work boats servicing the nearby wind farm are based here, while a busy fishing fleet occupies the rest of the space. Much of the quay space is devoted to the landing and processing of whelks and oysters, so you can imagine the smell that will assail your nostrils.

Berthing for yachts within this grubby and busy haven is only granted temporarily with prior permission of the harbour master. Small boat Mariners caught in a bad blow and unable to press on may be able to obtain refuge within. Just bear in mind that the approach is shallow, the harbour dries to soft mud at LWS and that the walls are totally unsuitable for a small yacht to lean against. (Without adequate fenderboards etc.) Furthermore strong onshore winds will send a swell into the harbour.

Funnily enough this working authenticity does not seem to deter tourists, who probably enjoy watching real harbour activity as opposed to a Marina full of yachtsmen fiddling with fenders and sipping G & T's. There is local opposition to plans to yuppify the harbour surroundings with housing and pubs, and let's face it working men in working boats need harbours like these to earn their living.

The harbour appears to be home to a traditional sailing barge, which are always of interest whether you are a mariner or a landlubber.

Approach

Before attempting any entry it is essential to contact the Whitstable harbourmaster.

He can be reached on VHF channel 09 and is on duty from three hours before high water to one hour after high water. The callsign is " Whitstable Harbour Radio". Alternatively the harbour office can be contacted on 01227 274086.

Any kind of approach from the East will involve giving due consideration to Whitstable Street, a drying shingly bank that juts out from the shore and like an accusing finger. Other shallow patches extend from the tip of this finger, and the extremity is marked by the red can Whitstable Street buoy (Fl.R.2s). It is partnered by the green conical Columbine buoy (Fl.G.2s) and together they serve to define the start of the entrance to the Eastern Swale.

The normal approach from the East involves leaving the Whitstable Street buoy on your port hand side and carrying on in a WSW direction until you pick up the Columbine Spit green conical buoy (Fl(3)G.10s) off to starboard. A swing can then be made to the South, and the harbour can be approached with it bearing roughly SSE.

If emerging from the River Swale it will be necessary to leave the red can buoy Pollard Spit (Q.R) on your starboard side before shaping a generally south-easterly course for the harbour.

Whichever way you approach from it involves crossing shoal water, tide tables will need consulting, probably best to leave it till half flood thus tackling it on a rising tide.

The main thing is the deepest water and the safest approach is made with the harbour bearing between SE and SSE.

In the closer approach you find the red can Oyster buoy (Fl(2)R.10s), leave to starboard. The narrow entrance to the harbour has a Dolphin structure just off the West Quay, (Fl.G.5s), while the extremity of the West Quay is lit with two fixed a green lights arranged vertically. Similarly the end of the Eastern Quay is marked with two fixed red lights arranged vertically.

Entry is made between the two quays.

The directional light that used to be here has been discontinued.

Berthing

After having obtained permission to enter the harbour, seek the harbour master's advice about where to berth your boat to cause the least disruption.

Facilities

For the boat in the harbour there is not much in the way facilities. Water and fuel by Jerry can.

During a run ashore you will find enough shops, banks with cashpoints, and provisions for day-to-day needs.

Whitstable Yacht Club is adjacent to the harbour. This club is mainly for dinghy sailors and they launch from their own slipway. A link to their website is provided below:

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

Shoal draft yachts may be able to take the ground during settled weather on the firm muddy shingle in front of the club premises lying just to the west of the harbour. The slipway nearest to the harbour is for the public.

There are good transport connections as Whitstable Station is on the mainline, connecting with London.

What To Do

The town has proved popular with sightseers and holidaymakers, so if you do get to run ashore you will find plenty to do. It is even possible to arrange sailing barge trips from the harbour. A link is provided below to a local website that gives much useful information:

<http://www.simplywhitstable.com/>

Being famous for it's shellfish it is not surprising there are plenty of seafood restaurants, but all palates can be catered for in Whitstable as a glance through the couple of links provided below will show:

Pubs.

<http://www.beerinevening.com/pubs/results.shtml/el/Whitstable%3BKent/>

Eating Out.

[THE 10 BEST Restaurants & Places to Eat in Whitstable - Tripadvisor](#)

History

Whitstable is a seaside town in northeast Kent, southeast England. It is 8 kilometres (5 mi) north of the city of Canterbury and 3 kilometres (2 mi) west of the seaside town of Herne Bay. It is part of the City of Canterbury and has a population of about 30,000.

Known as the "Pearl of Kent", Whitstable is famous for its oysters, which have been collected in the area since at least Roman times. The town itself dates back to before the writing of the Domesday Book. Whitstable's distinctive character and ambience is popular with tourists, and its maritime heritage is celebrated with the annual Oyster Festival in July. After a period of decline, the oyster fishery industry is now thriving again, and freshly caught shellfish are available throughout the year at several seafood restaurants and pubs in the town.

In 1830, one of the earliest passenger railway services was opened by the Canterbury and Whitstable Railway Company and, in 1832, the company opened Whitstable harbour and extended the line to enable passage to London from the port. The railway has since closed but the harbour still plays an important role in the town's economy.

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History

Archaeological finds indicate that the Whitstable area was inhabited during the Palaeolithic era, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. Oysters were harvested in the area in Roman times, and charters indicate that there were Saxon settlements where salt production and coastal trade occurred. The town was first recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086, under the name Witenestaple, meaning "the meeting place of the white post", which referred to a local landmark. At that time, Witenestaple was an administrative area which stretched from the coast to the village of Blean, 3 kilometres (2 mi) north of Canterbury. The area contained three manors at Seasalter, Northwood and Swalecliffe. The Seasalter and Swalecliffe manors were owned by the church, and the manor at Northwood was run by noblemen on behalf of the king. Fisheries were located at the Seasalter manor, saltworks were at the Northwood manor, and pigs were farmed at the forest in Blean. By 1226, the name of the area had evolved into Whitstaple.^[4] Around 1300, saltworks were opened at the Seasalter manor, and, in 1325, a sea wall was built there to prevent coastal flooding.

By 1413, the three manors had combined, forming the Whitstaple manor, and had been sold to a religious foundation in Essex. In the 1500s, the manor was seized by King Henry VIII during his suppression of the church, and was given back to the nobility. In 1574, a Royal Patent was granted to the manor owner for the fishing of its oyster beds. In the same year, the lands at Tankerton were incorporated into the manor. A copperas works was established at Tankerton in 1588 which operated until about 1830. By 1610, the name Whitstaple had become Whitstable.

Around the mid-1700s, goods and passengers began to be transported by ship between London and Whitstable, and a toll road was built to the cathedral city of Canterbury. These improvements in transport led to the town's development as a seaside resort; the first advertisements for bathing machines at Whitstable appeared in 1768. In 1790, the manor was sold to private landowners. The rights to harvest the oyster beds were bought in 1793 by the newly established Oyster Company of Free Fishers and Dredgers.

On 3 May 1830, the world's first steam-hauled passenger and freight railway service was opened by the Canterbury and Whitstable Railway Company. The line ran from Westgate in Canterbury to Whitstable town centre. The six-mile (10 km) railway was designed by William James and built at a cost of £83,000. The railway line's initials, C&WR, and Whitstable's shellfish industry eventually led to its nickname: 'The Crab And Winkle Railway'. At first, trains were pulled along on ropes by steam-driven stationary winding engines up the inclined planes and by a locomotive for the rest of the journey. The winding engines were located at Tyler Hill and Clowes Wood. The locomotive used was the *Invicta*, an 0-4-0 inclined cylinder tender locomotive built by Robert Stephenson of Newcastle for £635, which pulled three carriages.

Whitstable harbour was opened by the railway company in 1832, and the rail line was extended, enabling goods to be directly transferred from ships onto the trains. The harbour provided shelter for around 20 sailing ships of up to 150 tons, and had sidings for around 80 rail wagons. A dock was built for transferring freight between sea-going and river vessels. Whitstable harbour's main trade was importing Northumberland coal, which was then taken to

Canterbury or transported by the South Eastern Railway to Croydon and Reigate.

In 1840, the Invicta locomotive was retired and replaced by horses until a third winding engine was built at South Street. The Invicta was kept for scrap, but in 1898 work began on its restoration. The restoration continued intermittently, until it was finally completed in 1977 in York by the National Railway Museum. The locomotive was returned to Canterbury on 3 May 1980 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the line. It is now displayed at the Canterbury Museum.

In 1845, the Canterbury and Whitstable Railway Company was bought by the South Eastern Railway, who then introduced steam locomotives capable of operating along the entire length of the railway. These locomotives were coke-fired, so two ovens were built near the harbour to convert coal into coke. Coke production continued until 1880 when coal-fired locomotives took over. The ovens and their chimneys were demolished in 1892. On 16 November 1869, 71 buildings in the town were destroyed by a fire started at a shop near the harbour.

The Sea Cadet Corps traces its origin to the town. In about 1856, the Naval Lads' Brigade was started in Whitstable by the Reverend Henry Barton. In 1904, it was renamed the Sea Cadet Corps.

In 1936, a plant to manufacture tarmacadam was built beside Whitstable Harbour, on the site of the old coke works, but after World War II, the harbour gradually fell into decay. In 1958, Whitstable Urban District Council purchased and repaired the harbour with the intention of rejuvenating the town's economy. The ownership of the harbour passed to Canterbury City Council in 1974. By the early 20th century, the Oyster Company of Free Fishers and Dredgers had become the Whitstable Oyster Fishery Company. Oyster production drastically declined between the 1940s and 1970s due to pollution, disease, bad weather and underinvestment. However, since the 1970s there has been a gradual improvement.

The Crab and Winkle Line finally closed in 1953. About 40% of the line was reopened as a footpath and cycleway under the stewardship of a local charity, the Crab and Winkle Line Trust. Plans exist to extend the path along the old line into the centre of Whitstable and out to the harbour.

Transport Links

Whitstable railway station is on the Chatham Main Line, which runs between Ramsgate in East Kent and London Victoria. Other stations on this line include Broadstairs, Margate, Herne Bay, Faversham, Gillingham, Rochester and Bromley South. Whitstable is around 1 hour and 20 minutes from London by fast-service train. A National Express coach service runs between London Victoria and Ramsgate. Trains run to London's Cannon Street station, provided primarily for business commuting.

There is a Stagecoach bus service running every twenty minutes to neighbouring Herne Bay and Canterbury, where many Whitstable residents go to work and shop. The A299 road, known as the Thanet Way, runs between Ramsgate and Faversham via Herne Bay and Whitstable, and merges with the M2 motorway at Faversham.

The town's distinctive character and ambience has led to a strong tourist industry, which is promoted each year by the Oyster Festival. As of early 2007, Canterbury City Council were planning to boost tourism by building retail developments in addition to the existing shopping centre.

Events and venues

Each July, Whitstable celebrates the Oyster Festival. The nine day festival traditionally starts with an opening parade on the nearest Saturday to St James' Day. The parade, starts with the official "Landing of the Catch", followed by the procession of the oysters in a horse-drawn dray through the town, stopping to deliver the catch to local restaurants, cafes and public houses. The rest of the festival consists of entertainment for both adults and children, with local art on display around the town, and many establishments offering local fish dishes.[39]

May Day is celebrated with the annual Jack-in-the-Green parade, with traditional English dancing throughout the town, a fair at Whitstable Castle and a maypole dance by local schoolchildren overlooking the sea.

The Whitstable Museum and Gallery displays artifacts and portraits relating to the town's seafaring traditions, with special features on oysters, diving and shipping. In 2001, the Museum was awarded the international Nautiek Award for services to diving history. The town's seafood industry can be explored at the Oyster and Fishery Exhibition.

The town's main theatre is the Playhouse which is owned by theatrical group, the Lindley Players. The theatre is hired out to other groups such as the amateur Phoenix Theatre Group and the professional Playtime Theatre Company. Several amateur music and choral groups have been formed by local residents. The town's only cinema was called the Imperial Oyster, which has been closed to make way for a more profitable cafe.

Attractions and landmarks

The town has shingle/sandy beaches flanking the harbour, where sunbathing, swimming and water sports are popular. A notable feature of Whitstable is The Street, a natural strip of shingle bank which runs out to sea at right angles to the coast, for a distance of about half a mile. Located to the east of the harbour, it is revealed only at low tide, when it is possible to walk out along it. A view of The Street can be seen on the hilltop lawns of Tankerton Slopes.

Off the coast of Whitstable is a windfarm, consisting of 30 wind turbines, each 140 metres (459 ft) high, providing enough electricity to power 70,000 households. A now-redundant offshore World War II sea fort is visible from the town's coast. Sailing trips are available from the harbour to the windfarm, the sea fort and a seal watching spot in the Thames Estuary.

Island Wall, the closest street to the seafront, has numerous buildings dating from the mid-19th century including the Neptune and Wall Tavern pubs, and the Dollar Row cottages, which were built from the proceeds of a salvage operation on a ship carrying silver dollars. The street is home to the Favourite, one of the few remaining Whitstable oyster yawls. Built in 1824, it is now managed by the Favourite Trust, a charitable trust who undertake fund raising to maintain the historical vessel.

The town is criss-crossed by numerous small alleys, once used by fishermen to reach the beach. Many of these are now registered as public rights of way and are still in frequent use. Squeeze Gut Alley, through which most people have to walk sideways due to its narrowness, is one of the more notable.

The town is a popular destination for watersport enthusiasts. Established in 1904, the Whitstable Yacht Club is one of the oldest yacht clubs in England and takes part in local and national competitions throughout the year. Each year, the town hosts the International Waterski Championships.

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