

## Introduction

Cowes has long been known as the epicentre of the English yacht racing scene.

With its position at the centre of the Solent, and interesting and challenging waters to be sailed virtually on the doorstep it's not surprising. The fact that it's on the Isle of Wight adds to that feeling of actually arriving somewhere offshore, as opposed to just coasting.

For the visiting small craft mariner, Cowes harbour offers all tide access, and berths are relatively easy to obtain and reasonably priced. Having said that, for the cruising yachtsman Cowes is best avoided during Cowes week which happens every year at the beginning of August. The place is packed, prices are higher, and there is general mayhem on the water. It is suggested that for a first visit, you do your passage planning carefully and book a berth somewhere before you even depart; to arrive off Trinity landing and then start bleating on the radio looking for somewhere to tie up for the night would be very unsailor-like (unless, of course you are very big and very rich!!) For racing types sailing around the Isle of Wight offers very interesting navigational challenges and winds from just about every angle in the course of the circumnavigation. For a fast boat an early morning start can see you back on your mooring in time for last orders at the pub.

The town has a surfeit of yacht clubs many with a Royal prefix, much concerned with racing and less concerned with offering hospitality to the visiting yachtsman. Exceptions to this attitude dealt are with later. In the approaches it may be necessary to pass through a large precautionary area, with moving exclusion zones for heavy shipping in the area from Bramble Bank towards Egypt Point (covered elsewhere) and at all times the seaborne visitor must be acutely aware of the constant ferry traffic, including the fast cat, that use the narrow channel.

### **Be aware that the New Breakwater Project is now complete**

The town is split into two, East and West, and connected by the chain ferry, with West Cowes being the yachting centre. Cowes has long been connected with shipbuilding and other marine related industries, and away from the main high street lays streets and streets of small terraced houses and estates housing the hard-working population. East Cowes again consists of rows of terraced houses, a few shops and little else. All in all the first-time visitor wandering around might wonder why such a workaday place as Cowes became a premier yachting centre.

Approaching from the sea it looks rather promising, but quickly degenerates into a rather industrial looking scene approaching the chain ferry. Once past Cowes the River Medina completely changes character flowing through open countryside as far as Newport. (Covered in a separate article). Do not let the above descriptions put you off, Cowes really does need to be visited and virtually all backup facilities for the boat and crew are available here.

Outside of Cowes week reasonably priced moorings can be obtained, while skipper and crew can take in the unique atmosphere ashore. The boat can be watered, fueled and provisioned with minimal fuss and lugging, whilst good evenings can be spent ashore in establishments well used to dealing with transient sailors. Perhaps the strangest thing about Cowes is the mix of sometimes overexcited, well-to-do yachting types living it up large in what is basically a small industrial working town. The residents appear to take all this in their stride happily, and yachting brings much needed work and money to this town every year.

Cowes harbour commissioners have many mooring options available for visitors, and it has to be said at a very good price, although maybe short on facilities. Other mooring options include marinas with excellent facilities and prices to match. In general the outer harbour up to the chain ferry used to get uncomfortable and lumpy in strong winds from a northerly quadrant. The new breakwater solves that problem. Once past the chain ferry there are a couple of further mooring options in the Cowes area, before the River Medina leaves Cowes behind and enters Folly Reach.

This article deals with Cowes (West and East), and a further article deals with the River Medina from Folly Reach down to Newport. If anything written here makes you think the writer doesn't like Cowes you would be quite wrong in your assumptions..... having lived on the Isle of Wight for many years and been in and out of the harbour on a regular basis Cowes comes thoroughly recommended as a potentially inexpensive and very useful spot.

In fact VisitMyHarbour have based their service centre at Clarence Boatyard in East Cowes.. so you can pop in and see us !

## Approach

Any kind of approach to Cowes from a northerly direction needs a thorough study of Central Solent chart.

Huge and heavy ships make their way to and from Southampton passing through this area of concern. The unfortunately positioned Bramble Bank blocks their direct access to and from Southampton water, and means they have to execute a lumbering turn virtually right off the entrance to Cowes.

Be aware that, if approaching from the West the buoyage changes direction in the vicinity of Egypt Point. The photo "Playing with the Big Boys" in our gallery shows the size of these leviathans literally dwarfing the Red Funnel car ferry, let alone your yacht. The entrance to Cowes Harbour is via a narrow, buoyed, deepwater channel that runs close to the western shore. This channel is much in use by fast and slow ferries, and there are very strong cross tides to be taken into account in the approach. Pilotage details for the approach are now given:

Associated British Ports are in charge of the traffic and safety in the critical precautionary area, and introduced some time ago the notion of a moving exclusion zone in front of and to the side of ships transiting this area. Forget all ideas about power giving way to sail, these monsters are constrained by draft and wouldn't stop for miles even with their engines full astern. We've quoted direct from ABP Southampton in the interests of safety and avoiding any confusion, find the full text in the expandable "More Information" section of this page.

Close approach and entry:

The Breakwater Project is, to all intents and purposes complete now and there is a raft of NOTAMs on the Commissioner's web to deal with revised buoyage. We have uploaded the latest UKHO chart and that covers the moved navigation marks. One thing, landing on the new breakwater in anything other than an emergency is prohibited (the rumours of a gibbet for offenders outside the HM's Office is unfounded!)

The regulations mentioned above are there to prevent serious accidents, and it makes sense to digest them thoroughly if planning to pass through this area of concern. Once in the approaches to Cowes switch to VHF channel 69 for Cowes harbour radio.(Harbour office 01983 293952) Vessels over 30 m are required to radio in before entering the channel. The speed limit in Cowes is 6 kn over the ground (not through the water).

If approaching Cowes from the East or West the behaviour of the tide across the entrance needs to be understood unless you want to be sailing on the spot for some time, going nowhere. From approximately one and a half hours before high water Cowes to three hours after there exists a strong West going set outside of Cowes harbour, and at springs it can reach 4 Knts. This West going set can even carry an influence into the harbour itself as far as the red can number four Buoy (Fl(3)R.5s). Approach from the West is best tackled after this period, i.e. from around an hour or so before LW Cowes, and always aiming to be in at least an hour before HW Cowes.

The five hours of easterly going stream are not as fierce, but still need attention if approaching from that direction. If approaching from the East a new Small Craft Channel was been established in the summer of 2012 in advance of the ongoing work to build a new breakwater. New buoyage has been placed to give navigational assistance in avoiding the Shrape Mud and this is shown on the chart given in this site. Despite this buoyage you need to be aware that there is not much depth between the new red Shrape Mud can buoy and the East Breakwater so to arrive there in a boat with a 2m draft at LWS would not be a good idea. Coming from the North or NE, shape your course east of the Bramble Bank and make for the Shrape Beacon aiming to to turn WSW and a half West about 50 yards off it. Head for the red can (Fl.R.3s) with its accompanying green conical buoy (Fl.G.3s) at the entrance to the channel The limits of the new channel are marked by standard port and starboard lateral marks all lit with different light signatures (so you'll need your stop watch at night.) leading one through the Small Craft Moorings and into the main channel. Care should be taken through these moorings as you can be set into them by the tide. Approaching from the West keep a good offing from Egypt Point with its rocky outcrops, taking note of the northerly black/yellow Cardinal buoy (Q) moored off here. In the summer there may well be moorings laid in the Solent off the Royal Yacht Squadron, leave these to starboard and pick up the green conical number one buoy (Q.G) and it's red can number two counterpart (Q.R) and turn SSE into the main channel for entry into Cowes.

When approaching the entrance buoys keep a good eye out for the Red Funnel ferries and fast cats, either preparing to leave harbour or approaching the entrance channel. In summer the entrance always seems extremely busy with small craft, and you can't help noticing the historic Cowes Castle on the Western side (c/w UPVC windows and conservatory, see note in history section). This magnificent building is home to the Royal Yacht Squadron, and the tiny little harbour that has recently sprung up in front of the club is for their use exclusively.

Should ferries be moving keep right over to the starboard side of the Channel, and a close eye should be kept on the Jubilee pontoon for any signs of activity by the fast cat should one be moored there (see photo 11). This photo clearly shows what you'll encounter in the approach channel...this is no place to be messing with sails.

Otherwise it is simply a matter of moving in with the clubs, pontoons, fast cat berth, and the marinas all on your starboard side. Near the marinas be prepared for inconsiderate yachtsman emerging without a thought for the traffic, or worse still backing out blind. At night the outside edges of all these pontoons and berths are marked with green lights (check the charts) but note there is no further green buoyage until the region of the Folly Inn. On the port side lie a multitude of small craft moorings just outside of the channel as marked by the red can buoyage. Anchoring is not allowed within these moorings, and strangers should keep out of this area. A westerly going tidal set can in some circumstances be felt as far as the red can buoy number four (Fl(3)R.5s).

With the layering up of the new breakwater Aug 2014, tidal flows within the harbour have altered, in particular a tidal "shadow" has developed that could confuse you. See the flow diagram in the "Navigation Images" and be prepared for corrective helm.

If proceeding up River the next obstacle to be dealt with is the Chain Ferry, lurking just around the blind bend, shortly after passing Shepards Wharf Marina on your starboard side and the car ferry terminal at East Cowes on your port hand side. **The Chain Ferry now has right of way over most vessels**. See the new Cowes Harbour Commission's directions:

[http://www.cowesharbourcommission.co.uk/chapter\\_6\\_chain\\_ferry](http://www.cowesharbourcommission.co.uk/chapter_6_chain_ferry)

**This is a total change in emphasis** and you should visit the above website to be perfectly clear in your obligations with respect to the ferry. Main thing is in your approach towards the ferry from whichever direction be very aware of what the tide is doing underneath you. Stopping and stemming the tide should the ferry be moving is a practical solution if the tide is against you. If the tide is under you it may be necessary to execute a quick U-turn in order to stem it. In normal circumstances the chains of the ferry lay submerged in the seabed, but when it is pulling its way across especially in strong tidal situations these chains can rise much closer to the surface. The harbour advice is to either slow down, stop or "if safe and practicable", maintain speed and pass well clear ahead of the ferry. (So much for the chains!!) The tide can run outwards through this restricted area at up to 4 kn and it is not unknown for unwary skippers of sailing yachts to find themselves ignominiously pinned against the side of this ferry. Photos number 18 and 19 show the OLD beastie, particularly note in photo 19 the chains. The new one is considerably bigger.

The chain ferry carries yellow flashing lights on it's forward going end at all times.

Vessels over 30 m and very large unmanoeuvrable yachts should call "Chain Ferry" on VHF channel 69 to advise of their approach, and just because you're past the ferries doesn't mean you may not encounter ships. The chain Ferry area always seems to be a bit of a bottleneck.

Once past the chain Ferry the run of the River is very clear with firstly a large fuel pontoon to starboard, then the UKSA. Opposite on the eastern bank lies East Cowes Marina. The best water is on the Western side of the River once past East Cowes Marina, and then swings towards the eastern bank in the region of Kingston Quay which is easily recognisable chimneys and power station. From here on to Newport is covered separately.

## Berthing

For the yachtsman or motorboater, Cowes offers a large choice of visitors moorings, many of which are under the control of the harbour authority.

Before you pass the new breakwater you will have been aware of the trots of buoys to the East & West of the main channel; two rows of these trots are for visitors and, if you have a large boat may well be your best option. Once past the breakwater you come into the harbour proper and the berths available are given in the order of their appearance; Trinity Pontoon, the Town Quay, Shepards Wharf. Other mooring options include Cowes Yacht Haven, and past the chain ferry, East Cowes Marina and further harbour authority pontoons. Several boatyards with moorings, and the UKSA complete the picture in the Cowes area. These are all now described with contact details and visitors mooring fees are covered. A word to the wise here; most of the organisations here offering moorings for visitors tend to park them on the outside of their facilities, often rafting two and three deep. On the outside of such a raft as far up as the chain ferry you will be close to the ferries steaming back and forward to the mainland and vulnerable to their wake and any navigational errors they may make. There was an incident here in October 2018

and it was noted that luckily there was no one sleeping on the injured yacht and that a yacht close by (on which the crew were turned in) had a lucky escape.

Dealing with the mooring options in the order you pass them seem sensible, so the very first little haven you see on your starboard hand belongs to the RYS and you are not allowed to use it. (Unless you are a member of the Royal Yacht Squadron or an Officer on her Majesty's Service (James Bond perhaps??)).

Next up is the spindly landing stage, **Trinity Pontoon**. The outside of this can be used to land and pick up, and certain areas of the inside can be used for an overnight berth with permission of the harbour authorities. Water and electricity are available. These two facilities can be clearly seen in photo number seven. The disadvantage of the Trinity pontoon is its exposed position, and the constant wash from passing traffic and ferries. The cost of the Trinity pontoon (2022) is £2.50 per metre overnight, with short stays of up to 4 hours (between 10 AM and 4 PM only) charged at £1.50 per metre.

Next up on the starboard side comes the **Town Quay**, just to the south of the fast cat Terminal. This is really only suitable for smaller shallow draft craft and can be seen in photo number 11. Prices for the Town Quay are the same as at Trinity Pontoon, and Cowes Harbour Control are on VHF channel 69 or 01983 293952. They now have their own very useful website:

<http://www.cowesharbourcommission.co.uk/>

**Cowes Yacht Haven** with its wavescreens comes up next, again on the starboard side. The Marina has few residents with plenty of visitors berths and is open 24 hours a day. The place is geared up for "events" and at these and other peak times can become very crowded with much rafting out required, and possibly booking in advance necessary. A berth here during Cowes week will definitely require booking in advance and a fat wallet to go with it. The protection inside is reasonable but in spite of the wavescreen winds from the northerly quadrant and passing traffic can cause a bit of rolling. Berthing prices here for 2022 will be £3.90 per metre per day throughout the week. Shore power is £4.45 per night. Short stays of up to 4 hours are around £1.20 per metre. Contact Cowes Yacht Haven on VHF channel 80 or telephone 01983 299975, with a link to their site below:

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

All the normal facilities will be found here with water and electricity on the pontoons, waste disposal, showers, toilets, and launderette. The site is very central for the town also. Boat services include a 30 tonne travel lift, with specialists in all fields available nearby. Check the directory.

Next on the Western side immediately after Cowes Yacht Haven comes **Shepards Wharf**, again under the control of the Harbour Authorities. Visitors moorings are available here on pontoons with walk ashore access, water and electricity on the pontoons together with showers and toilets. Prices here in the summer months are now (2022) £3.20 per metre per day with a surcharge for multi-hulls. Short stays are charged at £2.00 per metre. Electricity is available as an extra (£3.80). There is a large working boatyard here with a 40 tonne travel lift, and storage for dry sailing. Other specialist services are based at this yard, see directory. Not as central for the town, but still an easy walk. Contact details for the harbour authorities have already been given.

Once past the chain ferry there are two possibilities for mooring on the starboard side, the first being the **Medina Yard**. This yard is now part of the Diverse Marine company; it doesn't maintain visitors berths as such but will allow visitors to use its pontoon if space is available. Prices are £2.00 per metre which doubles in Cowes Week. This has become an unlikely place to find room as they have a couple of new contracts which are using the pontoons. It must be emphasised that this is a working boatyard rather than a marina so the shore-side facilities are basic. Call the yard on 01983 203872 to check availability.

The big advantage of berthing here is the shelter available (which is superior to anything available before the chain ferry), coupled with walk ashore access on the West Cowes side. Water and electricity are available at the yard, as well as the ability to lift vessels of up to 60 tonnes.

**The UKSA** also operates a similar deal when space permits on their large outside pontoon. Berthing fees are approximately £3.30 per metre per night, with short stays at around £6.00. They need to be contacted on 01983 294941 to check availability. The facilities here include water and electricity on the pontoons, showers, toilets and bar ashore. Cowes town centre is walkable from here too. Link to website below:

<http://uksa.org/>

In the River two isolated pontoons belonging to the harbour authorities can be used by visitors. These are clearly marked and called **Whitegates pontoons**, one on the eastern side before reaching East Cowes Marina, the other on the Western side off the Medina boatyard (only available during Cowes week and needs pre-booking). No real

facilities available on these pontoons, but a very reasonable £1.60 per metre overnight charge and frequent water taxi services right to the heart of town.

On the eastern side lies the unmissable **East Cowes Marina**, which is absolutely huge, complete with luxury yachtsman's residences ashore. This Marina can accommodate around 150 visiting boats of quite some size, certainly up to 20 m. The setting past the chain ferry is a bit less frenetic, and certainly more sheltered. The disadvantage of this spot is that it's a long way to the fleshpots of West Cowes, involving a hike through an industrialised area, and a trip across on the clanking chain ferry. The easier alternative is probably the water taxi providing a regular service for £3.00 single. See their website at:

[Water Taxis in Cowes Harbour, Isle of Wight \(cowesharbourcommission.co.uk\)](http://www.cowesharbourcommission.co.uk)

There are some local facilities available in the Marina and nearby, so don't be put off. Berthing charges are £3.75 per metre per night and. It should be noted that that price is inclusive of electric hook-up. Contact them on 01983 293983 or on VHF channel 80 callsign " East Cowes Marina". A link to their website is provided below: (Mind you that is still showing prices from a couple of years ago when we looked in March 2022)

<http://www.eastcowesmarina.co.uk/>

All the usual facilities are provided with electricity and water, showers and toilets as well as laundry. WiFi is available here. There is a Chandlers nearby, and a pub restaurant virtually on-site.

This just about concludes your mooring options at Cowes, anchoring is not really possible anywhere in this area. The other option is to carry on up River towards Newport and this is described elsewhere.

Updated March 2022 for the coming season

## Facilities

Individual facilities available at each berthing place have already been described, and this section deals with the more general facilities available in the Cowes area.

Fuel is available alongside at Lallows and 24 hours a day at the Yacht Haven but the largest bunkering facility is the fuel pontoon just south of the chain ferry on the Western side, and this facility is used by the lifeboat so one can assume the fuel is good and clean. Gas is available here too.

Water is available at the Marinas, and if on a harbour authority pontoon with no facilities it should be possible to water up at Shepards Wharf, the best plan is to enquire with the harbour authority.

Bottled gas is available at East Cowes Marina, the fuel pontoon mentioned above, and various other outlets including Hursts ironmongers.

Virtually all kinds of hauling and specialist work can be carried out in Cowes, as a glance at the business directory will show (I have had a 60 Ton MFV hauled and repaired in West Cowes). Sail makers, riggers, upholsterers, engineering, hydraulics, electronics..... just about anything you can think of can be fixed or built here.

An impressive list of yacht clubs make Cowes their home, but as far as I'm aware only two welcome visiting yachtsman (arriving at Cowes on board their own vessel) to use their premises and facilities. The Island Sailing Club is at the south end of Cowes Parade, telephone 01983 296621, link to website below:

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

The other welcoming club is the Cowes Corinthian YC, just south of the Yacht Haven. They have their own private pontoons outside the clubhouse, but unfortunately non members will need to find somewhere else to park their dinghies. They can be contacted on 01983 296333, and a link to their website is provided below:

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

Any other clubs in the Cowes area will be found in the directory, and should any of these offer hospitality to visiting yachtsman if they let us know they can be included here.

Shoreside facilities are a bit thin on the ground in East Cowes, however there is a Co-Op and Waitrose for provisioning and a cash machine, post office and pharmacy.

**West Cowes Warning: All the banks have gone**, (Meaning no facilities to change currency). Cash machine at Sainsburys (two, one inside and one outside), one outside the closed NatWest, one outside the Vectis Tavern. Cash regularly runs out on Bank Holidays. Post office went too, but has now been replaced with a tiny unit, opposite Pier

View tavern.

West Cowes can fulfil all provisioning needs, with a reasonable sized Sainsbury's in the High Street and Marks and Spencer food hall (excellent for pre-prepared meals to warm up on-board) by the bus terminal. Internet access ashore can be found...Costa Coffee and various cafes. There are any number of Chandlers, mainly of the fancy yacht clothing variety. Useful stuff for the boat may be found at Pascall Atkey, an interesting and ancient looking shop. Slightly away from the main drag in the non pedestrianised bit will be found Jolliffes chandlers, who have a excellent large stock, inc. paints. Just a bit further on is Becken of Cowes, the photographers. Some of the specialists may take a bit of tracking down, but they are here... check the directory.

AND..last but not least WE are here in East Cowes. Top floor office, Clarence Boatyard. Call 01983 293757 M-F 11-4

Transport islandwide is covered by Southern Vectis, with a small bus station at Terminus Road, and Newport bound buses call at the Red Jet terminal. Ferries go to Southampton, but unfortunately there is no direct rail connection by the ferry terminals, with the station being a cab ride away.

There are several slipways in Cowes, including Watch House Lane, Market Slip, Sun Slip and Spencer Thetis Wharf. In general these are all small and tight of access, okay maybe for dinghies. More popular perhaps is the slipway at the Folly Inn, covered in a separate article.

## What To Do

The visiting sailor will find no shortage of things to do in Cowes. Museums include the Sir Max Aitken Museum, in the Prospect, a prominent pink building in Cowes high Street. This houses an impressive collection of maritime memorabilia. The Cowes Maritime Museum (Beckford Road) has on display two of Uffa Fox's boats. (Uffa Fox was a real Isle of Wight character, and a great designer being responsible for the Fairey Atlanta an extremely unusual and capable boat).

For the kids the Isle of Wight Model Railway Exhibition and Museum at the parade may be worth a visit.

Eating out is well catered for in Cowes, with anything from a donner kebab up to fancy Italian all on hand. From fish and chips through to Indian and Thai, not forgetting seafood... it's all available here, as are pub meals.

Info from member Gary Flashman:

Let's assume you have berthed at Sheppards, settled down and are ready for a stroll into town:

Duke of York  
Tel 01983 295171

[Dukeofyorkcowes.co.uk](http://Dukeofyorkcowes.co.uk)

The Duke is close to Sheppards and the chain ferry (when it's working), and an easy walk from the town centre. As a pub it's old fashioned and friendly with a range of well kept ales, and the restaurant is again traditional with a good kitchen and serving hearty portions. They offer B&B with en-suite rooms, useful for crew changes etc.

Cowes Ale House  
Tel 01983 294027

[Cowesalehouse.co.uk](http://Cowesalehouse.co.uk)

Their strapline is 'How pubs used to be- and should be'. Their ales come from barrels on stillage behind the bar (they also offer a range of interesting lagers as well as wines etc) and their food is good old fashioned pie and a pint. Thankfully their sandwiches don't actually curl up at the edges. It goes without saying that the beer is excellent, the welcome warm and the ambience quirky. They often have live music - think folk or Irish rather than heavy metal - which can be great fun.

The Coast  
Tel 01983 289574

[Thecoastbar.co.uk](http://Thecoastbar.co.uk)

It's worth a trip to Cowes just to have a meal at Coast. It's that good. They offer Pizzas - the oven opens into the restaurant - as well as a more general menu. Their breakfast is excellent, with arguably the best coffee around (if

you're not up for a full breakfast just pop in for a cup) as is their main menu which among other things is high on Vicki's ranking one of the best crab salads. This comes dressed in its shell, claws and all, with chips and garlic mayo. It's a casual sort of place, jeans and tee shirt rather than jacket and tie, with a great atmosphere. It is very popular, needless to say, and although it is quite large, booking is a good idea, especially in the summer.

The Anchor

Tel 01983 292823

[Theanchorcowes.co.uk](http://Theanchorcowes.co.uk)

One of the most popular pubs in Cowes, the Anchor is huge, complete with a small garden. Nonetheless it has a very traditional ambience and a reasonable selection of ales. The kitchen offers good pub grub in decent portions. They routinely have live music. Again it gets very busy in the summer.

Pier View

Tel 10983 294929

[www.pierview.co.uk](http://www.pierview.co.uk)

Opposite the pier - you can only just see it, despite the pub's name - this is another traditional pub with a selection of ales and a good kitchen, and it's popular with race crews. There is a small pavement area outside where you can watch the buses go past

Fountain

Tel 01983 292397

[Oldenglishinns.co.uk/our-locations/the-fountain-inn-cowes](http://Oldenglishinns.co.uk/our-locations/the-fountain-inn-cowes)

Part of the Olde English Inns network, the Fountain is as much a hotel as a pub. It has a good traditional bar, a reasonable kitchen, good ales and a patio where you can see the pier and the marina. It is well placed for a crew change and right alongside the Red Jet terminus for the passenger service to Southampton.

Island Sailing Club

Tel 01983 296621

[www.islandsc.org.uk](http://www.islandsc.org.uk)

If you follow racing you will be familiar with the Round the Island race, which the ISC organise. It is tucked away down an alley-way so you need to look out for the entrance. They welcome visiting yachtsmen, you just sign the book, and have what must be the best outlook in Cowes. Looking out over the harbour mouth you have a commanding view of the passing waterborne traffic from the club room or in good weather the large patio. The kitchen offers a full restaurant menu with table service as well as bar meals. It goes without saying that the food is excellent. If all this sounds a bit formal it isn't, although you might prefer to change out of your more weather-beaten sailing gear.

Union Inn

Tel 01983 293163

[www.unioninncowes.co.uk](http://www.unioninncowes.co.uk)

A small pub with a basic kitchen, the Union offers accommodation, again basic and a little on the expensive side.

The Globe

Tel 01983 506053

[www.theglobe.bar](http://www.theglobe.bar)

Although the Globe has the potential to be a very good destination with a fine view of both the harbour mouth and the Solent, to my book they miss the point. They have a rooftop bar which could be the best in Cowes, however the place is set up as a sports bar with the emphasis on big screens rather than good beer or food.

Woodvale

Tel 01983 292037

[www.the-woodvale.co.uk](http://www.the-woodvale.co.uk)

Take a stroll westwards along the coast, past the Royal Yacht Squadron clubhouse - it's more like a small castle, complete with bronze cannon which are fired to start and finish races - and after about half an hour you'll find yourself in the village of Gurnard. Up the hill, to your left, is the Woodvale. Well worth the walk, which is very pleasant in its own right, the Woodvale has what must be one of the best outlooks on the Western Solent. With a lawned park sloping down to the foreshore and slipway there are normally dinghies, kite-surfers and assorted other small craft at play, together with yachts and commercial traffic in the middle distance. It's perfect for a sundown

drink.

They have a good kitchen, a variety of ales, and offer accommodation.

Just past the Chain Ferry:

Leaving Cowes and heading South your first challenge is the chain ferry, the main link between East and West Cowes for both passengers and vehicles. Up until a couple of years ago it was a minor inconvenience to river borne traffic, you simply kept a wary eye on it and passed astern when it was under way. The old ferry came to it's sell by date, needed to be replaced, and as often happens the replacement had to be bigger and better. The resultant vessel is so big that it simply doesn't work.

A bit of background. The ferry is located at the narrowest point of the river, sensibly enough, but this is also where the tide runs fastest. To make life even more entertaining it's on a sharp bend (to Stbd heading South). The new, larger craft has different chain characteristics as result of which their catenary is longer and shallower, and the navigable depth of the river significantly less. Being larger it also obstructs the sightline around the bend, making it much more difficult to manoeuvre around the ferry itself and completely obstructing the view of oncoming traffic whether from the North or South.

Needless to say the ferry has been withdrawn from service and the whole project is subject to litigation. (November 2017)

Navigate with caution, hopefully without incident.

As you pass the moorings take a moment to admire the wonderful traditional yachts moored either side of the river, and reflect on the brilliant work of the UKSA training budding sailors, from kids in dinghies to RYA Yachtmaster Ocean. They have some of our very best sailors to their credit.

East Cowes Marina

Tel: 01983 293983

This is a great place to hole up. It's modern, very professionally run and with most of the facilities you might need, and good showers. The Lifeboat pub, as near as dammit part of the marina, is again modern, clean and with a competent kitchen.

Getting to or from East Cowes on foot is bit of a hike past the back of factories, work shops and small yards but when you get to town there's a decent Waitrose, a small Co-Op, the car ferry terminal and a passenger ferry to take you across to West Cowes proper. Alternatively you can take the water taxi from the marina.

## History

Cowes is an English seaport town on the Isle of Wight, an island south of Southampton. Cowes is located on the west bank of the estuary of the River Medina facing the smaller town of East Cowes on the east Bank. The western town is sometimes referred to as West Cowes where distinction is needed - such as at the two differing ferry termini. However the unqualified name 'Cowes' invariably means the western town. This article describes both towns.

Leland's nineteenth century verses described the towns poetically as "The two great Cowes that in loud thunder roar, This on the eastern, that the western shore".

The two towns are linked by the Cowes Floating Bridge, a chain ferry. The combined population was 16,925 in the 1991 census, a figure that is easily doubled during the regatta in early August (see below). Each town comprises a civil parish.

Cowes is renowned for sailing, Cowes Castle being home to the world famous Royal Yacht Squadron, which ranks amongst the world's elite yacht clubs. The town gives its name to the world's oldest regular regatta, Cowes Week, which occurs annually in the first week of August. Later on in the summer, powerboat races are held.

East Cowes is the site of Norris Castle, and Osborne House, the former summer residence of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. The Prince had a major influence on the architecture of the area, for example on the building of St Mildred's Church in Whippingham, East Cowes, which features distinctive turrets imitating those found on a German castle. Both towns' architecture is still heavily influenced by the distinctive style of ornate building which Prince Albert popularised.

Transport and links to the mainland

Cowes and East Cowes are gateway towns for the Isle of Wight. Travellers to Southampton are served by a high speed catamaran passenger ferry from West Cowes and a vehicle ferry from East Cowes. Visitors arriving at East Cowes find it hard not to notice the world's largest Union Flag on the hangar doors of the building used originally by Saunders Roe and then by successive marine and aerospace manufacturing companies. From Cowes Pontoon (the Red Jet terminal) Southern Vectis buses take travellers on to other Island destinations. In the summer, the open-top

bus route "The Medina Tour" serves East Cowes.

For the more athletic, Cowes is often considered the start of the Isle of Wight Coastal Path.

#### History

There are two theories about the origin of the name:-

Cowes and East Cowes derive their names from the time of Henry VIII, when fortifications called cowforts or cowes were built on the east and west banks to dispel a French invasion.

Cowes and East Cowes were named after two sandbanks, one on each side of the River Medina estuary, and recorded in 1413 as Estcove and Westcove, which were named after a supposed likeness to cows (that is, the bovine creatures).

#### Early history

In earlier centuries the two settlements were much smaller and known as East and West Shamlord; the East then being more significant settlement. The settlement of Shamlord at East Cowes was first recorded in 1303. The Isle of Wight had been a frequent target of attempted French invasions with some notable incursions. The west fort survives to this day, albeit without the original Tudor towers, as Cowes Castle but the east fort disappeared in the eighteenth century and should not be confused with East Cowes Castle built subsequently by John Nash.

#### Royal patronage creates a yachting centre

It is believed that the building of an 80 ton, 60 man vessel called Rat O'Wight[6] on the banks of the river Medina in 1589 for the use of Queen Elizabeth I sowed the seed for Cowes to grow into a world renowned centre of boat-building. However, seafaring for recreation and sport remained the exception rather than the rule until much later. It was not until the reign of keen sailor George IV that the stage was set for the heyday of Cowes as 'The Yachting Capital of the World.' In 1826 the Royal Yacht Squadron organised a three-day regatta for the first time and the next year the king signified his approval of the event by presenting a cup to mark the occasion. This became known as Cowes Regatta and it soon grew into a four-day event that always ended with a fireworks display.

#### Great houses

In Cowes the 18th century house of Westbourne was home to a collector of customs whose son, born there in 1795, lived to become Dr Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby School.

Northwood House was the home of the Ward family. It was donated under trust to the town in 1929, the grounds becoming Northwood Park. William George Ward was a close friend of the poet Tennyson and in whose memory the poet wrote six lines.

During the reign of Queen Victoria, who made her summer home at Osborne by acquiring and rebuilding Osborne House, East Cowes was the subject of planned estate of grand houses, groves and parks. The scheme, not finding the finances it needed, was folded, but a few residences built in the early stages still survive to this day such as the former Albert Grove residences of Kent House and Powys House on York Avenue.

In East Cowes Norris Castle was designed in the Norman style by James Wyatt in the late eighteenth century. The building survives and today remains a private home. In 1798, the architect John Nash, began building his home, East Cowes Castle, where he later entertained the Prince Consort and other prominent guests. East Cowes Castle was notable for its Gothic towers and turrets, and elaborate castellation. Nash died in 1835 and is buried in the tower of East Cowes Church which he also designed. East Cowes Castle was demolished during the 1960s, although the ice house remains and is visible in Sylvan Avenue.

#### World War II and the Blyskawica

Its industry and proximity to Southampton and the Royal Navy's home at Portsmouth made the Island a frequent target of bombing during World War II. The shipyard of J. Samuel White was badly damaged by air attack in early May 1942 but, when rebuilt, innovative ship construction methods had been introduced. The first warship completed by the renewed yard was HMS Cavalier. During the air raid, the local defences had been fortuitously augmented by the Polish destroyer Blyskawica (itself built by White's), which put up such a determined defence that, in 2002, the crew's courage was honoured by a local commemoration lasting several days to mark the 60th anniversary of the event. In 2004 an area of Cowes was named Francki Place in honour of the ship's commander.

To celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the Queen's coronation in 1977, the main hangar doors of what was then the British Hovercraft Corporation (a successor to Saunders Roe) were painted with the world's largest image of the Union Flag, which can still be seen today.

#### Industry

Local industry in both Cowes and East Cowes has always centred on the building and design of marine craft and materials associated with boatmaking, including the early flying boats, and sailmaking. It is also noted as the place where the first hovercraft was tested. East Cowes was also once home to the manufacturer Saunders Roe, who built the flying boat The Saunders-Roe Princess, as well as the Black Knight rocket and the Black Arrow satellite carrier rocket. Major present-day employers include BAE Systems Integrated System Technologies (Insyte), which occupies the site of the old Somerton Aerodrome at Newport Road, Cowes; and GKN Aerospace in East Cowes. The former Saunders-Roe factory at Venture Quays- which still boasts the world's largest Union Flag now produces wind turbines, which can be seen laid on the for shipping out. Due to local objections no wind turbines have been

allowed to be erected on the Isle of Wight.

East Cowes

East Cowes has been more characterised by industry than West Cowes in which yachting predominates, which some would argue has produced a cultural rift, leading to East Cowes being referred to derisively as Narnia by the West, due to the alleged eccentricity of its inhabitants.

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Footnote:

Mention was made in general description section about the UPVC Windows installed in Cowes Castle, home of the Royal Yacht Squadron..... which caused a bit of uproar in the Isle of Wight.

A good few years ago an interesting story emerged in the Isle of Wight County Press..... some jobsworth in the Isle of Wight Council started harassing an elderly lady living in Brading (I believe) because she had changed her leaky, draughty, wooden window frames for smart new UPVC ones. Her crime was that she lived in a conservation area, and the council insisted she remove her new Windows and reinstall wooden framed ones...

Well it wasn't long before some wag pointed out that the RYS had installed UPVC Windows in their historic Cowes Castle, without asking for or receiving any permission. This left the hapless council in a bit of a quandary..... were they going to demand the RYS remove their UPVC Windows and replaced them with wooded frames ?? Why should the RYS be treated any differently from this elderly lady... this was the question being bantered about in the local paper. If I remember correctly even Prince Philip commented, and the Isle of Wight Council with much scraping and kowtowing ended up granting the RYS retrospective planning permission. I do not remember the fate of the UPVC Windows in Brading, but would have been surprised if the council got away pushing their luck after such a climbdown.