

Introduction

Harwich forms the entry point for both River Orwell and River Stour.

The Haven ports including Felixstowe, Harwich, and Ipswich handle an incredible amount of heavy shipping, mainly containers. Any yachtsmen or motorboaters planning to use or pass through Harwich on their way up one of rivers needs to be very much aware of their rights and obligations regarding the commercial shipping entering and leaving Harwich, further details supplied later. An overview of the area can be downloaded at:- [YACHTING-GUIDE-2023-MAP-SIDE-v7-FINAL-LOW.pdf \(hha.co.uk\)](#) (Opens in a new window)

Within the area covered by this article there are a couple of mooring opportunities for small boats, firstly a pontoon thoughtfully provided by the harbour authorities not far from the control tower on the southern (Harwich) shore. Secondly, Shotley Point Marina lies almost directly opposite this on the northern shore. Both these facilities are just within the River Stour.

The container port of Felixstowe with its conspicuous blue travelling cranes and deepwater berths for heavy ships is of no interest or use to yachts.

Day-to-day provisioning can perhaps be accomplished more easily on the Harwich side, but neither of the facilities mentioned are on top of large supermarkets.

The port offers easy entry (ships and traffic notwithstanding) and good shelter once within. Small craft looking for better shelter and accommodation can move up either of the two rivers, both described in separate articles.

Approach

Any kind of approach to Harwich is going to involve dealing with the shipping channel....

.... and the enormous container ships (and fast ferries) that are in and out every day and night. (Check out the size of these leviathans in the photo gallery). These vessels are constrained by their drafts, furthermore when they are stacked up with containers the visibility forwards from the bridge is very limited at close quarters. It is the duty of leisure craft to keep out of their way and not impede them, and to aid this recommended small craft tracks have been established, showing clearly on the charts. There is a chart on the Harwich website (link below) but it is just a schematic diagram and we supply an up-to-date of the Admiralty Chart on this site which is better.

Pilotage details:

The area is under control of the Harwich Port Control, and they operate on VHF channel 71, callsign Harwich VTS. All craft using the harbour are obliged to keep listening watch on this channel. Details of ship movements are promulgated.

Small craft are not required or encouraged to call on this channel other than in very special circumstances, because of the weight of traffic. The following is directly quoted from the Harwich Havens Yachting Guide and deals with poor visibility of less than half a mile:

"(i) All craft with VHF radio maintain a listening watch on Channel 71.

(ii) Provided you are aware of your position and you intend staying on the yacht track, just monitor the commercial activity in Harwich Harbour as reported on Channel 71, or Channel 68 in the River Orwell.

(iii) If you are uncertain of your position, it may be prudent to anchor well clear of the shipping channel until visibility improves. Do not anchor close to the channel buoy.

(iv) If you do not have radar and intend crossing any shipping lane, and you are in serious doubts as to the commercial movements, call Harwich VTS on Channel 71, or Ipswich Port Radio Channel 68 whilst in the River

Orwell. In summer time, or at times of peak commercial activity, you will probably be directed to a working channel.

(v) If you pass a craft without radio which asks you for guidance, you should advise Harwich Harbour Radio of the details. If the craft is going in your direction it is hoped that you will give every support in the spirit of co-operation that should prevail at these times.

Harwich VTS cannot undertake control of small craft in reduced visibility but the operators will give whatever assistance is possible at the time.

If you are not visible on radar you will be beyond shore assistance. Always carry a radar reflector, flares and suitable emergency equipment.

Remember your obligation under the prevention of collision regulations, particularly the ability to make an efficient sound signal." End of quote.

A link to the Harwich Haven Authority website is included below, and gives much useful information for anyone planning to visit:

<http://hha.co.uk/leisure/>

Approach from the North.

All small craft approaches lay of the South of the main shipping channel, so if coming from the North you will have to cross it. The recommended crossing point in a north-south direction is chosen because at this place the dredged channel is much narrower than farther eastwards, meaning less time crossing it. The crossing is shown clearly on the chart and is adjacent to the red can buoy Inner Ridge (Q.R). NB This differs from a crossing of a TSS in that they specify a track to be maintained whereas with a TSS the boat/ship's head should be at right angles to the TSS. From here the East/West going small craft track parallels the main shipping channel, and you can follow this in by keeping the red can buoyage on your starboard side.

Approach from the South.

From the South you will be coming from the Wallet. Approaching Walton on the Naze it is necessary to maintain a good offing from the coast to avoid shallows. 1 mile minimum is recommended. The area is infested with lobster pots waiting to snag your propeller so a sharp lookout will be needed during the day, and at night it would be best to stand well offshore.

Keeping well off the shore and heading generally northwards you should be able to spot and identify the green conical Medusa buoy (Fl.G.5s), you can leave this to starboard and set a NNW course.

Find and identify the Stone Banks Buoy (Fl.R.5s) which can also be left to starboard. This marks patches with only around 2 m at CD. From here providing the visibility is reasonable you should be able to see Harwich just to the west of North. Head towards Harwich and about a mile before you get there you should be able to find the Pye End Buoy on your port side. It is then a matter of locating the red can buoyage marking the ship Channel into Harwich and parallel this by leaving the buoys to starboard and following them.

Approach from the East.

Any kind of approach from the East will need large scale and up-to-date charts showing the Sunk traffic separation schemes. This area can be avoided by making your approach from the North East.

Closer approaches.

Dredging work has now finished: Update March 2010, dredging work finished although some work is still going on with the ship berths. In effect the entrance should be back to normal now. See chart.

In the closer approach there are shallows lying off the end of the breakwater projecting from Blackman's Head, with least depths of 1.3 m. Keeping close to the red can buoyage will clear this. Alternatively it is possible to pass close

to the head of the breakwater and then make a generally north-easterly course (towards Felixstowe) before picking up the red can buoyage again which is left to starboard.

An easterly Cardinal buoy, Harwich Shelf (Q(3)10s) is laid from April to October marking the shallow Guard Shelf off the town of Harwich as you make your entry. This needs to be left on your port side and the red can buoy Grisle (Fl.R.2.5s) on your starboard side. Pass between these two.

Continuing onwards in a generally north westerly direction will bring you to the red can Guard buoy (Fl.R.5s) and at this point you can either make a hard turn to port and head west past the Ro Ro terminal (for the visitors pontoon at Halfpenny Pier) or crossover directly to the Shotley Spit southerly Cardinal buoy (Q(6)+Lfl.15s). (If you're planning to go up the River Stour or to Shotley Point Marina).

Berthing

Moorings in this area consist of Halfpenny Pier on the Harwich side, and Shotley Point Marina opposite.

Full details including prices follow:

In the area covered anchoring is prohibited in the fairway or within 200 feet of the edges from Parkstone Quay in the Stour out to the Rolling Ground Buoy.

It may be possible to find an Anchorage on the northern shore of the Stour off Shotley, tucked in behind the trots of moorings and near to the pier and Shotley Sailing Club. Obviously not a place to leave the boat unattended.

Harwich Town.

If aiming for **Halfpenny Pier** (see photo gallery), be aware that it is offered on a first-come first-served basis. Rafting up is permissible but the area is subject to swell and wash so good fendering will be needed. Obviously this is no place to take root, but suitable for daytime and overnight stops though if intending to stop overnight you would be advised to seek an inside berth, especially in a NE set. The alternative is to go across to Shotley.

Harwich is run by the harbour authorities, and visitors spots are clearly marked. It comes up on your port side after passing the harbour control tower, the lifeboat station and a rough looking wooden pier. Yachts can use either side of it.

It is free to use during the day and water is obtainable. Modest charges apply after 4 PM, for those wishing to stay overnight (£15 per night for a 10m boat). The harbourmaster here is on 01255 243030. A water taxi ferry runs between here, Shotley Marina and Landguard Beach at Felixstowe.

The authorities are to be applauded for providing some facilities for small craft in this busy commercial harbour. It's a really useful stopping point if you berth up either the Stour or Orwell and are intending to go out into or come back from the North Sea and need to wait for a suitable tide.

Details can be found at [Visitor Moorings - Harwich Haven Authority](#)

Shotley Point Marina.

The Marina is easily identified on the northern shore almost opposite Halfpenny Pier. There is a 40 m water tower behind it, and the all glass control tower by the entrance to the lock.

Entrance is available 24 hours and is via a narrow dredged channel with a minimum of 2 m in it. Initial approach is made from the green conical Ganges buoy (Fl.G.5s). To the north-east of this lie two posts marking the entrance to the channel. The starboard hand one is marked with a green conical top and is lit Fl(4)G.15s, while the port one is an easterly Cardinal lit VQ(3)5s.

Approach to the lock is on 340° when between these posts. There is a directional leading device on the right hand side of the lock looking in. This consists of a square box framed in white, when your craft is directly on the right line inwards you will see a vertical black line in the middle of the screen. If you deviate to one side of the Channel or

other the screen will show orange arrows pointing you back in the right direction. There is a waiting pontoon outside the lock, while the lock itself is controlled by traffic signals.

Probably the best plan is to call the Marina on VHF channel 80 or or telephone them on 01473 788982, before making any approach manoeuvres. A link to their website is also provided below:

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

Full Marina services are available here with water and electricity on the pontoons, toilets, showers and bath ashore, together with a launderette and WiFi throughout.

Diesel is available as well as Calor and camping gas. For the boat, liftings are available up to 40 tonnes and repairs can be handled on-site.

The charges here (2022) work out at £3.10 per metre overnight, with electricity an additional £3.10 per day.

Facilities

If you are on the Harwich side (the Halfpenny Pontoon) you will be virtually on top of Harwich old town.

No fuel is available, but you can fill water cans from a tap at the pier. Toilets and showers are available ashore for overnight stops. A chandlers is located nearby, but there are no boatyard facilities. A couple of yacht clubs are based nearby, Harwich Town Sailing Club which is concerned with dinghy racing, and Harwich and Dovercourt Sailing Club, that is cruising orientated. Their details are in the directory.

Day-to-day provisioning can be obtained from a convenience store not far away in Market Street and other local stores, but serious stocking up may need a mile plus hike to Dovercourt,(ample supply of big supermarkets who may deliver to the pier). Nearest banks are in Dovercourt.

The railway station is only a few minutes away, and London Liverpool Street can be reached via Manningtree from here.

The Marina facilities on hand at Shotley Points Marina have already been touched on, and stores can be obtained in the nearby village (no bank but PO). During the season basics may also be available at the chandlery. Shotley sailing Club is nearby and is in charge of the moorings laying to the south-east of the pier.

From the Shotley area buses can be had to Ipswich, and the little ferry can take you across to Harwich town.

Neither of these locations are ideal for a major stock up, but could make a good stopover if on passage North or South.

This busy area is not generally suitable for trailer craft, but there is a launching place on the Dovercourt Seafront, and an area set aside off the beach and away from the ship channel for high-speed craft. It is a bit shallow but as anything other than low water springs there should be over a metre in most of this area. This ramp is a council run facility and boats need to register with the council first and provide proof of insurance. Contact the council on 01255 253235.

What To Do

If you are moored on the Harwich town side you will find ample cafes and pubs nearby, including the Pier Hotel

virtually as you step ashore. A visitors centre based at the pier can give you plenty of ideas for things to do in the area, perhaps a visit to the Lifeboat Museum or the Maritime Museum.

A couple of links are provided below for further investigation, Two highly rated pubs are close by, the New Bell inn, and the Samuel Peyps.

Pubs.

<http://www.beerinthevening.com/pubs/results.shtml/el/Harwich%3BEssex/>

Restaurants:

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

If you are at the Marina you will find it has its own bar/restaurant on site "The Shipwreck" which serves food from Wednesdays through to Sundays. There is another pub, the Bristol Arms, to be found along the sea wall. This establishment serves bar and restaurant meals.

History

The town received its charter in 1238, although there is evidence of earlier settlement - for example, a record of a chapel in 1177, and some indications of a possible Roman presence.

Because of its strategic position, Harwich was the target for the invasion of Britain by William of Orange on November 11, 1688. However, unfavourable winds forced his fleet to sail instead into the English Channel and eventually land at Torbay. Due to the involvement of the Schomberg family in the invasion, they were made Marquesses of the town.

Writer Daniel Defoe devotes a few pages of his A tour through England and Wales to the town. Visiting in 1722, he noted its formidable fort and harbour "of a vast extent"[2]. The town, he recounts, was also known for an unusual spring rising on Beacon Hill (a promontory to the north-east of the town), which "petrified" clay, allowing it to be used to pave Harwich's streets and build its walls. The locals also claimed that "the same spring is said to turn wood into iron", but Defoe put this down to the presence of "copperas" in the water. Regarding the atmosphere of the town, he states: "Harwich is a town of hurry and business, not much of gaiety and pleasure; yet the inhabitants seem warm in their nests and some of them are very wealthy".

Port

The Royal Navy is no longer present in Harwich but Harwich International Port at nearby Parkeston continues to offer regular ferry services to the Hook of Holland (Hoek van Holland) in the Netherlands and Esbjerg in Denmark. Many operations of the large container port at Felixstowe and of Trinity House, the lighthouse authority, are managed from Harwich, and plans for the development of a new container port in Bathside Bay were approved by the British government in December 2005.

The town's coastal position, however, made it vulnerable to the North Sea Flood of 1953.

Architecture

Despite, or perhaps because of, its small size Harwich is highly-regarded in terms of architectural heritage, and the whole of the older part of the town, excluding Navyard Wharf, is a conservation area.

The regular street plan, with principal thoroughfares connected by numerous small alleys, betrays the town's medieval origins although many buildings of this period are hidden behind 18th century facades.

The extant medieval structures are largely private homes. Notable public buildings, all later, include the parish church of St. Nicholas (1821) in a restrained Gothic style, with many original furnishings including a (somewhat altered) organ of the same date in the west end gallery, and the Guildhall of 1769, the only Grade I listed building in Harwich.

On the quayside may be seen the Pier Hotel of 1860 and Great Eastern Hotel of 1864 (the latter now divided into apartments), both reflecting the town's new importance to travellers following the arrival of the railway line from Colchester in 1854.

Also of interest are the High Lighthouse (1818); the unusual Treadwheel Crane (late 17th century); the Electric Palace Cinema (1911), one of the oldest purpose-built cinemas to survive complete with its original projection room and ornamental frontage still intact and operational; the Old Custom Houses on West Street; and a number of Victorian shopfronts. There is little notable building from the later parts of the 20th century, but major recent additions include the lifeboat station and two new structures for Trinity House; that organisation's office building, next door to the Old Custom Houses, was completed in 2005. All three additions are influenced by the high-tech style.

Notable inhabitants

Harwich was the home town of Christopher Jones, the master and quarter-owner of the Mayflower, and was also a base for that ship. The famous diarist Samuel Pepys was the Member of Parliament for Harwich. Christopher Newport, captain of the expedition that founded Jamestown, Virginia, also hailed from Harwich.