

The Thames continued...

The Thames has provided a form of transport since pre-Roman times which became a lucrative and competitive trade. In particular, the Honourable Company of Waterman and Lighterman regulated river traffic very closely between Windsor and Gravesend ensuring that fair prices were charged.

Fishing has always been of great importance in the Thames. You could find salmon, trout, eels, shrimps and cockles right up until the 19th century when the river fell victim to industrial and household pollution. Today, pollution has been greatly reduced and species of fish that have not been found in the river for over 100 years are reappearing.

Historically, smuggling has been an important occupation in the Thames through Kent and Essex. It continued well into the 19th century until customs men stamped it out.

The river has been the scene of regular entertainment since the mid 19th century. There is currently three regattas during the year: the Town Regatta, Summer Regatta and the Shrimpers Regatta.

Attempts to embank the Thames between London and Gravesend to control its flow took place in the 11th and 12th centuries.

Since the building of the Thames Flood Barrier across Woolwich Reach in May 1984, the level of water in the Thames up-river from there can be controlled and London is protected from the threat of flooding. Down-river from Woolwich, the defences have recently been built up to protect land and property adjacent to the river from a thousand-year tidal surge.

Gravesham is just a few minutes away from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games by High Speed Rail link. Ebbsfleet International and Gravesend railway stations will both have services to take visitors to London and to Stratford – the home of the Games. Gravesham is an ideal base for enjoying the Olympics and the magnificent heritage and countryside of North Kent.



Start your visit



Directions

Car: Gravesend is clearly sign posted from the M2, M20 and M25. Direct access is provided by the A2, A226 and A227.

Taxi: Conveniently situated at New Road, close to the station and shops.

Train: Ebbsfleet International station from trains connecting to the continent. Gravesend, Northfleet and Higham from London Charing Cross or Cannon Street. Alight at Northfleet to connect to Ebbsfleet International. Meopham and Sole Street from London Victoria. The new High Speed Rail service will take passengers to and from Gravesend Station and London St Pancras from December 2009.

Bus: Gravesend is served by Arriva Bus Service call 08712 00 22 33

Ferry: Passenger services run between Gravesend and Tibury with buses to Tibury railway station. For a timetable call 07973 39 01 24

For more information visit www.towncentric.co.uk or call Towncentric, Gravesend's Visitor Centre.



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The Riverside

Explore Gravesham's riverside heritage



The Thames in the History and Life of Gravesham

Gravesend is 24 miles from London by land, 26 by river, and 21 miles from the Nore at the mouth of the estuary. The northern boundary of Gravesham Borough, which runs through the centre of the river, is about 7 miles from the Northfleet Hope to Higham Creek.



The river has been an important historical feature in Gravesham for many years. The Romans settled along its

bank in Higham and Northfleet in particular and built Watling Street parallel to it. Springhead at Northfleet was a posting station along a Roman road and is the modern name for the Roman 'Vagniacae', a place of great religious significance to them and one of the most important Roman sites in Kent.

Close to TOWNCENTRIC building the remains of a small Roman settlement was found. The marshes at Higham are rich in Roman remains and pottery in particular from the settlement were found beside the river there.



The church of St. Mary at Chalk has Roman bricks in the east wall of the chancel.

Chalk was quarried at Northfleet and used for both agricultural and building purposes. The trade, which

lasted from the 13th century well into Victorian times, of exporting chalk and returning with cargoes of coal became known as 'carrying down white, bring back black'.

The chalk quarried at Northfleet has had a major influence on that town's development. At Springhead, there is evidence of Roman cement manufacturing using chalk as one of its main components, but local manufacture really took off when William Aspdin (son of Joseph Aspdin who patented Portland Cement in 1824) took over an established cement company at Northfleet Creek and introduced Portland Cement

manufacture to the area in 1846. A disused chalk pit beside the Thames was leased from Jeremiah Rosher and converted in 1837 by George Jones into a botanical garden known as 'Rosherville Gardens' which developed into the famous pleasure gardens. Thousands of Londoners on their days off came down, mainly by paddlesteamer, to visit its many sideshows and attractions.



Ship building took place in Northfleet at Pitcher's shipyard from 1788 until it closed in 1860. A variety of types of craft was built, including a number commissioned by foreign countries. An important riverside occupation has long been fishing. Shrimps caught in the Thames were, together with the local watercress, famous delicacies, especially for the many daytrippers.

Another riverside trade was smuggling. Although it wasn't as famous for smuggling as the north and east Kent coasts, the Thames boasted its share of these traders. Many of the riverside pubs were haunts for the smugglers, in particular the 'Three Daws' in Gravesend.

Gravesend, from the early times was considered to be the entry point for the Port of London. Large ships anchored off Gravesend to load and unload passengers and cargoes.

From 1401, Gravesend was granted the sole rights to ferry passengers to London and back in special 'Tilt Boats', which then charged the princely sum of a ha'penny for the four hour journey to Billingsgate in London. Today, there is still a ferry across the river to Tilbury linking Kent with Essex.

Whilst Gravesend still retains its importance for shipping – most ships stop here to pick up pilots from London and Tilbury.



The Thames

The River Thames is England's most important river, spanning most of the breadth of the country and historically providing vital economic, cultural and social links.

The 215 mile long river rises at Thames Head near Cirencester in Gloucestershire and flows east to London; from there past the boundaries of Gravesham to the Estuary and into the English Channel at Southend.

London, founded by the Romans, grew into a great trading centre and was the greatest port in the world by the 19th century. The economic and geographical importance of the Thames meant it needed to be safeguarded against enemy invasion and gradually a number of defences grew up along its banks.

Successive monarchs, realising how vital the river was to the defence of England, built a series of forts in the area. Gravesend was sacked by the French in 1380, and when the Dutch sailed up the Medway in 1667 they set fire and destroyed many of the British warships anchored there.



Places to visit along the riverside

1 St. George's Church. The church was rebuilt in 1731 after the original was destroyed in the town fire in 1727. The Native American Indian, Pocahontas, was buried in the previous church in 1617. Her statue, unveiled in 1958 by the Governor of Virginia, can be seen in the churchyard. Many memorabilia and displays about her life can be seen inside the church, including beautiful stained glass windows.



2 The Rum Punctureon. The pub is standing on the site of a former smugglers' pub. For the past few centuries it has been referred to as "The New Falcon". Recently, the new owners decided to give its old name back (prior to the mid 19th Century).

3 Elizabeth Gardens. Seating area adjacent to the Ferry landing stage to view the river activity.

4 Town Pier. This is the oldest cast iron pier in the world. Formerly a passenger Pier, it was erected in 1834 at the bottom of the High Street when Gravesend was the most popular resort for Londoners. Now fully restored, people can enjoy a drink at the bar or have a meal at the newly opened restaurant while looking at ships sailing up and down the Thames.



5 Saxon Shore Way. The walk, which traces the ancient coastline of Kent for 140 miles, starts at the Town Pier following the bank of the Thames to terminate in Rye, Sussex. The Wealdway also starts from Town Pier and finishes in Eastbourne.

6 The Three Daws. The public house is over 500 years old. Underground tunnels lead from its cellars, and were once used by smugglers and men escaping from press gangs. It is claimed to be the oldest pub in Kent.



7 St. Andrew's Gardens. Situated between The Three Daws public house and St. Andrew's Arts Centre, people can sit and relax while looking at the river.

8 Bawley Bay. The bay is adjacent to St. Andrew's Church. Shrimp boats moored there in the 19th century. Many families set sail from this tiny bay to start a new life in Australia and New Zealand.



9 St Andrew's. It was originally consecrated in 1871 as a mission church for the waterside community of Gravesend. It has been used as an Arts Centre since 1976.

10 Mission House. Built in 1840 as the Spread Eagle Tavern it was taken over in 1870 by the St. Andrew's Church Mission. It was also used by General Gordon of Khartoum as a reading room to teach poor local children.

11 Anchor Cove. Adjacent to the Mission House it has a local memorial to Merchant Seamen.

12 Gravesend Blockhouse. One of five artillery blockhouses built in the area by Henry VIII. Located by the Clarendon Royal Hotel lawn.

13 The Clarendon Royal Hotel. Built in the mid 17th century opposite the Gravesend Blockhouse, it was originally intended as a residence for the Duke of York before he became James II. It subsequently became the Ordnance Storekeepers Quarters. After being used as a hotel for some years, the site is being re-developed.



14 Royal Terrace Pier. Built in 1842 for use by day trippers to Gravesend, arriving from London by steamer. Princess Alexandra arrived here from Denmark to marry the Prince of Wales, later to become Edward VII. Privately owned, and subsequently restored in 1978.

15 Customs House. In 1812, ships no longer had to stop at Gravesend to pick up customs officials. Consequently, customs officers moved from Whitehall Place to the present Customs House in 1815/6. Its most important features include an unsupported central staircase designed by the famous interior designer Robert Adams (the Architect of the Kings Works). There is also a lookout room on the roof giving an unrestricted view of the Thames. HM Customs and Excise Service at Gravesend is still active today.

16 Riverside Leisure Area. Situated along the banks of the Thames, this is an excellent point to view shipping. At the eastern end are the Gordon Gardens, named after General Gordon, who lived at Fort House from 1865-1871. His statue is located here. At the western end are the Fort Gardens, where Milton Chantry and the New Tavern Fort can be found.



17 Milton Chantry is the oldest building in Gravesend founded in 1322 as a charity chapel in an older house by the Earl of Pembroke. After the Reformation it was disused until the 17th century when it became an inn and subsequently part of the coastal defence works and a barrack for the fort. It is now the location for the Gravesham Heritage Centre and houses many local fascinating displays and artifacts.



18 New Tavern Fort. Remains of an 18th century fort built against the threat of invasion from France. It was extensively rebuilt by General Gordon in about 1870 and includes a large underground magazine complex. The Fort was re-armed in 1904 and guns representing that period of development are on display.



19 Thames and Medway Canal. Fully opened in 1824 it was originally designed to protect and expedite shipping plying between the naval dockyards at Chatham, Woolwich and Deptford. Now the Canal Basin is an all year-round berthing facility with direct access to the River Thames.



20 Milton Blockhouse. This was sited in the north-west corner of the Canal Basin. Its buried later angular bastion addition (1545-7) has been surface-marked and identified by a plaque.



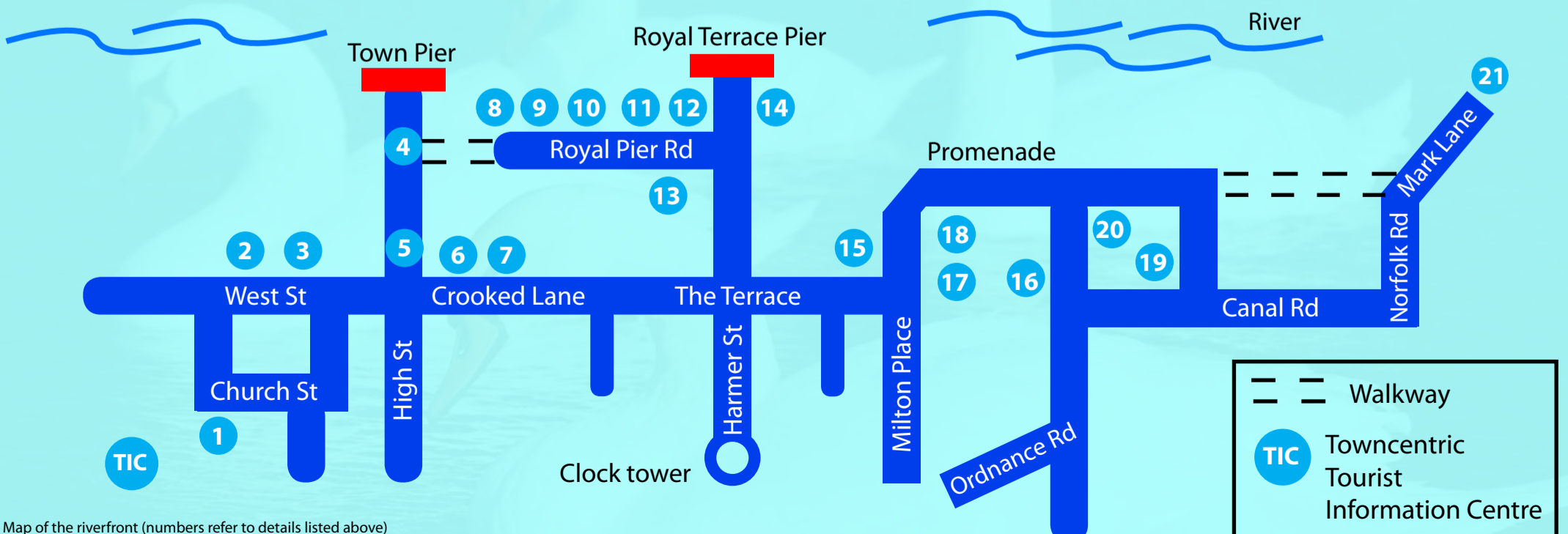
21 The Ship and Lobster. Known as the first and last pub on the Thames, being along the river wall just as you reach the marshes from Gravesend. Probably found at the time that Charles II and his brother James raced barges in the area. Supposedly the pub known as 'The Ship' that featured in Dickens's 'Great Expectations'.

Other Places to view the riverside

Shornemead Fort, Shorne, 1870. It was built on the site of a battery from the 1790s and another from the 1840s. A battery was added next to it during the Second World War and a concrete 'hard', for loading tanks on to landing craft for the D-Day landings, was built in front of the fort.

There is a Shore Viewing Area at the bottom of Burch Road, Northfleet, where a Second World War mine watchers' post may be seen on the river side of the wall.

From the river walk you can see views over to Essex which includes Tilbury Fort and the Docks. Tilbury was built in 1670-1683 to a bastioned design; it incorporated the Tudor Blockhouse formerly on the magnificent gateway, rebuilt by Charles II. Now in the care of English Heritage it can be reached by river from Gravesend on the ferry service (passengers only) Monday to Saturday.



Map of the riverfront (numbers refer to details listed above)