

Maldon and Heybridge Basin



<https://englandscoast.com/de/listing/maldon>

Maldon & Heybridge Basin are two settlements located on the Blackwater estuary in Essex, occupying significant points of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Canal (CBNC). The harbour contains a number of historic vessels listed on the National Register of Historic Vessels, as well as maritime skills providers working on the harbourside.

The harbour is not currently undergoing any significant regeneration projects, although there has been much effort to maintain its function as a regional visitor attraction and centre for historic vessel conservation. A number of Thames sailing barges are situated in Maldon, and are among those vessels currently making use of Maldon's historic harbourside facilities and offering public sailing trips and open days. There appears to be a high degree of civic and heritage involvement in the harbour's historic character, suggesting it is likely that future developments will be sympathetic. The primary threat currently facing the harbour is over-development and un-sensitive infrastructure 'improvements', although Maldon District Council has indicated that preservation of the harbours' historic characters is a primary consideration.

Maldon & Heybridge Basin

Brief history of Maldon & Heybridge Basin

Maldon & Heybridge Basin are two settlements located on the Blackwater estuary in Essex, occupying significant points of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Canal (CBNC). Maldon, situated at the confluence of the Rivers Blackwater and Chelmer, is now primarily used by leisure craft and occasional inshore fishermen, with Hythe Quay containing a large collection of Thames Sailing Barges. While much of the current harbour infrastructure dates to the Victorian period, Maldon and the Hythe have functioned as a significant maritime settlement since the Anglo-Saxon period and earlier, with substantial archaeological evidence for a late Iron Age, later Roman, port with trading links to the Mediterranean.¹

During the 16th and 17th centuries, Maldon was a centre for the distribution of heavy goods (coal and lime) as well as lighter agricultural produce around the southern and eastern coast, and into London. Imports of Baltic timber were still handled at Sadd's Wharf, Fullbridge into the 20th century.² Its commercial functions had begun to significantly decline in the late 18th century, following the construction of the CBNC (1797), which bypassed Maldon in favour of Heybridge Basin owing to the limitations of vessel sizes into Fullbridge Quay, and later the extension of the Eastern Counties Railway to Maldon in 1848.

The development of Heybridge Basin is relatively recent, with commercial traffic entering from the east coast estuary of the River Blackwater to unload cargoes onto barges on the River Chelmer for transportation inland to Chelmsford by the CBNC since 1796. Archaeological evidence exists for use of Barrow Marsh prior to the construction of the basin, with two saltworks behind the current Lock House and on the site of the Blackwater Sailing Club, as well as remnants of the earliest sea defence wall. Originally used by Tyne coal merchants in the 19th century, the canal basin saw a sharp decline in shipping with difficult North Sea weather conditions and the advent of the railways in the latter half of the century. Various industries repopulated its wharves in the late 19th and 20th centuries, including timbers, prepared woods and live eels, until it became a largely residential and pleasure boat community.³

Maldon's major historical association is the Battle of Maldon (991 AD), in which the Anglo-Saxon Ealdorman Byrthnoth was defeated by Viking invaders led by Olaf Tryggvason. Related in the Old English poem 'The Battle of Maldon' of unknown provenance, as well as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the 12th century *Liber Eliensis*, it is now marked by a statue of Byrthnoth and listed as a Registered Battlefield by Historic England. It is believed that the Viking invaders arrived at the battle site along the causeway from Northey Island to what is currently Maldon Promenade, where numerous post-medieval wrecks and Thames barges have been identified on the intertidal mudflats. The town itself has 10th century origins, being the location of one of three royal mints (925 AD) from the reign of Athelstan (927-29) into that of Henry I (1100-35).⁴ Its significance continued into the later medieval period when Maldon shipwrights were employed in the building of Henry VIII's warship *Henri Grace à Dieu* (1512) in Woolwich, later to convey the king to the Conference with Francis I of France on 'The Field of the Cloth of Gold'.

The harbour also has connections with the later British empire in the 18th century, with the Maldon-born Horatio Gates defecting to become Major-General of the rebels in the American War of Independence (1775-83). A memorial window was unveiled in 1928 to George Washington, Founding Father and first president of the United States, whose great-great grandfather Lawrence Washington is buried in its adjoining graveyard.

Associations and interested parties

¹ Nigel Brown et al, 'Maldon District Historic Environment Characterisation Project' (2008), 19.

² David Stenning and David Andrews, 'Maldon Conservation Area Review and Management Plan' (2006), 8.; Brown, 31.

³ <http://www.heybridge-basin.co.uk/Outline%20History.html> (Accessed 18/04/22)

⁴ Stenning and Andrews, 7.

Maldon & Heybridge Basin

Governmental and sub-governmental: Maldon and Heybridge Basin, partly owing to their collections of distinctive provincial architecture and surviving maritime vessels and trades, have several parties and initiatives interested in the protection of their heritage and setting. Essex County Council, as part of its 'Maldon District Historic Environment Characterisation Project' (2008), has designated both towns as Historic Environment Character Areas (HECA). Both 'Saxon and Medieval Town of Maldon' (HECA 5) and 'Historic Heybridge and the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation' (HECA 6) encompass waterside sites. The HECA initiative is intended to *"provide the opportunity to safeguard and enhance the historic environment as an integrated part of development within Maldon District"* by:

*"...identifying opportunities for the integration of historic environment objectives within action plans for major development proposals but also [offering] a means by which conservation and management of the historic environment can be pursued."*⁵

Maldon District Council first designated the Maldon Conservation Area in 1969, subsequently extended to encompass a significant area including Fullbridge, the Hythe and Promenade Park.⁶ Adjacent to the Maldon Conservation Area, the Chelmer and Blackwater Conservation Area extends into Maldon harbourside and the Maldon-Heybridge waterway in Zones 9 and 10 respectively. All three conservation areas were initiated and placed under the jurisdiction of Maldon District Council. The situation of Maldon and Heybridge on the Blackwater estuarine and intertidal landscapes have also facilitated their inclusion as a nationally significant site for Heritage England's (HE) 'Water and Wetland Heritage Strategy' (2011).⁷ Essex County Council's subsequent report on the historic environment of the Maldon Coast elaborated that:

*"In many ways the most critical aspect of the historic environment is the pattern of estuary, creek salt marsh and grazing marsh; a landscape which is the result of many centuries of interaction between humanity and the sea. Therefore, preservation of historic landscape character is an important issue; and integrated management of the historic and natural environments, together with grazing and other agricultural activities, is crucial."*⁸

The possibility of significant archaeological excavations of Maldon harbour and its distinct intertidal landscape, which may relate to Anglo-Saxon and earlier maritime activity will be discussed further as 'under threat and unknown' historical assets.

Local interest groups: Local heritage groups are active in Maldon. The Maldon & Heybridge Basin Heritage Harbour Association, formed in September 2019, has initiated much community engagement with Maldon's maritime heritage, including the creation of Heritage Trails along the harbourside; facilitating apprenticeship schemes in specialist maritime skills and services; and organising Open Day events for visitors and vessel owners. It has also launched a plaque scheme, the first being placed on Cooks Yard, used by Thames Sailing barges from 1894, in March 2022.⁹ It currently has representatives from Beeleigh Abbey to Osea Island, including Maldon and Heybridge Basin.

The Maldon Society also has an active programme of Blue Plaques at locations with maritime connections, including 61 North Street, commemorated as the home of John Thomas Howard, Master Ship Builder (1849-1915).¹⁰ The Maeldune Heritage Centre archives and adjacent oral history 'Listening Station' are managed by

⁵ Brown, 12.

⁶ Stening and Andrews, 1.

⁷ Essex County Council, 'The Maldon Coast (Inter-Tidal Archaeological Survey)' (2008), 1.

⁸ 'The Maldon Coast', 2.

⁹ <https://www.maldonandburnhamstandard.co.uk/news/19981774.new-heritage-plaque-heybridge-boat-yard-launches-scheme/> (Accessed 16/04/22)

¹⁰ <https://www.maldonandburnhamstandard.co.uk/news/18544675.stephen-nunn-explores-history-maldons-fishing-community/> (Accessed 16/04/22)

Maldon & Heybridge Basin

the Maldon Society, and the Maldon Museum in the Park is affiliated. The Maldon Riverside Association, with over 150 members, is involved in several harbourside projects including the Heritage Weekend talks, the Maldon Regatta and litter-picking and tree-planting activities.

Other local interest groups exist which use the harbourside facilities, in particular engaging with its heritage assets and services, including the Maldon Little Ship Club. Formed in 1927 as a local sailing and social club, its clubhouse is situated on Hythe Quay, and it regularly makes use of the Blackwater estuary. The 'Salt, Water and Beer Shanty Band' is based in Maldon, performing shanties, folk and traditional songs. Sea-Change Sailing Trust provides residential opportunities, sailing and seamanship training in its 'Youth Sailing Scheme' for young people and vulnerable adults. It currently operates from Maldon harbour, as do the Steam Tug Brent and the Thames Sailing Barge Trust. Operating from Downs Road Boatyard, the Heritage Marine Foundation offers apprenticeship schemes in traditional maritime skills, actively contributing to the conservation and operation of historic vessels from Maldon harbourside.

Maritime infrastructure and businesses: Maldon has a well-established base of maritime skills and services providers, registered on the Shipshape Network Directory of Skills & Services including: :

- Landbreach
- Colin Swindale
- Valiant Marine (sailmakers)
- Volspec
- One Stop Chandlery
- The Watershed
- Wilks (rubber plastics) co.
- Brooks Bros (UK) Ltd.
- Mantsbrite Marine Electronics
- Heritage Marine (trade supplies) Ltd.
- David Patient Shipwright Ltd
- Topsail Charters
- P.J. Downs and sons
- TS Rigging Ltd
- North Sea Sails
- Downs Road Boatyard
- Thames Sailing Barge Trust
- Heritage Marine Foundation¹¹

Condition of heritage assets

Existing protections: Maldon town and harbour has 224 listed buildings, including one Scheduled Monument, and one Registered Battlefield site. While many of these are concentrated around the high street, a number are located on the Hythe as the focus for Anglo-Saxon and medieval settlement, and further development into the 18th and 19th centuries. Notable buildings include Chapman's Bridge, built in the early 19th century to support the CBNC, the Jolly Sailor Public House and Taylor and Son Sailmakers, all Grade II listed. Heybridge Basin has 9 listed buildings, including one Scheduled Monument. A number of these relate to canal operations, such as the Canal Lock and Lock House, both Grade II listed.

¹¹ Extracted from https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/shipshape-search?search_api_fulltext=maldon (17/04/22)

Maldon & Heybridge Basin

There are 31 vessels on the National Historic Ships Registers associated with Maldon and Heybridge Basin, 16 of which are currently located at Maldon. These include *Centaur*, *Reminder* and *Telegraph*, all of which are National Historic Fleet vessels. A number of Thames sailing barges are situated in Maldon and are among the number of vessels currently making use of Maldon's historic harbourside facilities and offering public sailing trips and open days.

Registered Historic Vessels currently at Maldon:

Registered vessel	Details
<i>Comus of Wivenhoe</i> https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/749/comus-wivenhoe	60ft gaff-rigged wooden schooner built in 1882 by James Husk of Wivenhoe. Currently undergoing restoration at Heybridge Basin.
<i>Linette</i> https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/2485/linette	35ft racing yacht built in 1926 by Berthon Boat Co. Ltd of Lymington, Hampshire. Underwent major rebuild by Peter Brookes Classic boats, Maldon in 1995-96.
<i>Hydrogen</i> https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/208/hydrogen	95ft Sprintsail Barge built in 1906 by John Gill and Sons of Rochester for Burt, Boulton and Heywood, chemical manufacturers of Silvertown, as one of three barges <i>Carbon</i> , <i>Oxygen</i> and <i>Hydrogen</i> . Sold to Arthur Bell & Sons in 1978, going on to promote Bells Whisky around the UK
<i>Valentine D17</i> https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/2888/valentine-d17	53ft naval pinnacle built in 1965 by Curtis and Pape of Looe. Released from Admiralty service in 1993, briefly used in France as ferry before return to UK.
<i>Kitty</i> https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/209/kitty	82ft Sprintsail Barge built in 1895 by John and Herbert Cann of Harwich. Currently operates charters from Maldon through Sailing Barge Kitty Ltd., carrying up to 46 passengers and four crew.
<i>Thistle</i> https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/188/thistle	86ft Sprintsail Barge built in 1895 by William Hamilton and co. of Port Glasgow for H.A. Covington, coal merchant of Battersea, London.
<i>Centaur</i> https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/193/centaur	86ft Sprintsail Barge built in 1895 by John and Herbert Cann of Harwich.
<i>Pudge</i> https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/224/pudge	82ft Sprintsail Barge built in 1922 by London & Rochester Barge Co. Currently undergoing restoration by Thames Sailing Barge Trust at Fullbridge.
<i>Reminder</i> https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/1966/reminderr	88ft Sprintsail Barge built in 1929 by F.W. Horlock of Mistley.
<i>Viking Saga</i> https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/338/viking-saga	50ft pleasure cruiser built in 1947, and currently employed in cruising on River Blackwater.

Maldon & Heybridge Basin

<i>Aelfwyn</i> https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/2246/aelfwyn	34t Saxon Class leisure craft built in 1959 by Priors of Burnham on Crouch.
<i>Telegraph</i> https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/1457/telegraph	53ft Boston Smack built in 1906 by Alexander Gostelow of Boston, Lincolnshire for William Stringer, fish merchant.
<i>Nellie (Not currently registered on NRHV)</i>	80ft Sprintsail Barge built in 1901 by Cremers of Faversham.
<i>Torbay Lass</i> https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/95/torbay-lass	77ft Brixham Trawler built in 1923 by R. Jackman and sons of Brixham.
<i>Stork</i> https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/1985/stork	50ft Customs and Excise patrol vessel built in 1926 by Vosper, Portsmouth. Sunk by Luftwaffe during the blitz on Plymouth to be re-floated as ferry after the war.
<i>Brent</i> https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/3/brent	74ft steam tug (TID 159) built in 1945 by William Pickersgill and Sons of Southwick, Sunderland for the Ministry of War Transport.

Successful restorations: Maldon and Heybridge Basin have seen a number of successful heritage restoration initiatives in recent years. Registered historic vessels recently restored by tradesmen in Maldon harbour include *Pudge* and *Centaur*, both of which are maintained and used by the Maldon-based Thames Sailing Barge Trust, conserved with Heritage Lottery funding. Other vessels currently berthed in other locations around the UK have undergone restoration by Maldon harbour's maritime specialist businesses such as TS Rigging Ltd who were employed in restoring the masts, spars and rigging of the *Cutty Sark* in 2015.¹²

Maldon waterfront's Promenade Park, originally built in 1895, has seen much development and regeneration in recent decades, being awarded its fifth Green Flag by the Civic Trust in 2005, accredited for the provision of high-quality green spaces. Further development which is more sympathetic to the park's Edwardian heritage could restore accreditation owing to its proximity to the waterfront and inclusion of the Maldon Museum in the Park, which has hosted a number of local heritage events, including a talk on shipbuilding in September 2021.¹³

Under threat or unknown: Heybridge Basin's United Reformed Church is currently on HE's Heritage at Risk register and situated near to the basin and lock. Within the Heybridge Basin Conservation Area, it is in very bad condition having been closed in 2003 when its congregation dwindled to two and been threatened with demolition in 2005.¹⁴ The local parish council has been recently established and is currently receiving advice from HE for the building's restoration.¹⁵ While the church is not of direct significance to Heybridge Basin's maritime history, nor is it obviously situated within the waterfront area, it should be considered a key part of the area's community and local identity.

¹² <https://www.maldonandburnhamstandard.co.uk/news/9171380.cutty-sarks-masts-mended-in-maldon/>

¹³ <https://www.maldonandburnhamstandard.co.uk/news/19571179 roundup-heritage-open-days-events-across-maldon-district/>

¹⁴ <https://www.maldonandburnhamstandard.co.uk/news/14837813.eyesore-derelict-heybridge-basin-church-to-be-turned-into-fish-restaurant/>

¹⁵ Tim Howson, 'Maldon District Heritage at Risk Register 2022' (2022), 22.

Maldon & Heybridge Basin

Maldon's boatyards and industries have significant heritage, some of which has already been partially explored (ie. Cook's Yard, endowed with a blue plaque in March 2022) but some of which is unknown. The construction on the Hythe of the HMS Jersey (1654), briefly captained by Samuel Pepys in 1669 and later to see action at the Siege of Derry (1689), to be finally captured by the French Navy in 1691 is an historical association relatively unknown to visitors to the harbourside. Some significant aspects of Maldon's maritime heritage have been lost in recent decades, including the waterfront site of Jon Sadd & Sons. Demolished in 1994 having been operational since 1729, the company was heavily involved in wartime production:

"During the war years 1939-45 with their sawmill working 24/7, the company was building for the war effort: motor torpedo boats, Fairmile type motor launches, air-sea rescue craft, pontoons, small assault craft, motor fishing vessels, aircraft parts, flight cooking and messing boxes..."¹⁶

Both Maldon and Heybridge Basin are situated in unique ecologies tending towards both exceptional preservation of submerged artefacts and deposits and distinctive patterns of land-use and human activity, on account of its confluence of estuarine waters, saltmarsh, grassland and mudflats. Marine archaeologists have registered significant remains of fishing weirs dating to Anglo-Saxon and earlier periods in nearby sites such as Goldhanger. Drafted on behalf of Maldon District Council, the 'Maldon Coast (Inter-Tidal Archaeological Survey)' registered the harbour area's potential for significant submerged archaeological finds as it:

"...appears to have been extensively occupied/utilised from the Mesolithic period onwards. Deposition of river silts during subsequent rises in sea level has resulted at least in part, of the preservation of highly significant prehistoric land surfaces...The causeway leading from Northey Island to the mainland is thought to form part of the area on which the Battle of Maldon (991AD) was fought...[and] the zone contains a number of post-medieval hulks and wrecks including three Thames Barges."¹⁷

Threats and opportunities

Maldon District Council's 'Heybridge Basin Conservation Area Review and Character Appraisal' (2006) discusses concerns for residential development plans in the basin area, in particular:

"...probably the greatest threat to the character in the continuing need for 'modernisation' and 'improvement' of existing buildings, where alterations could result in considerable loss of character by carrying out works as permitted development."¹⁸

Maldon harbourside has a number of policies in place to protect the harbourside, including a Replacement Local Plan (2006), preventing development which could *"detract from the character of the area, adversely affect nature conservation interest, or have a detrimental effect on the character of the Conservation Area."*¹⁹ However, recent construction of a housing terrace along Fullbridge riverside and the planned development of the Maldon Splash Park in Promenade Park could potentially threaten the harbourside's historic character.

Maldon District Council's 'Maldon Conservation Area Review and Character Appraisal' indicates that the local authorities are sympathetic to the working harbourside setting. The report makes specific reference to *"the boatyard and industrial activity on the riverside [making] a special contribution to the town's identity"*.²⁰

¹⁶ <http://www.maldonarchive.com/john-sadds-sons.html> (Accessed 16/04/22)

¹⁷ 'The Maldon Coast', 35-36.

¹⁸ Corrie Newell et al, 'Heybridge Basin Conservation Area Review and Character Appraisal' (2006), 1.

¹⁹ Stenning and Andrews, 6.

²⁰ Stenning and Andrews, 62.

Maldon & Heybridge Basin

There appears to be a high degree of civic cohesion and communal identity invested in Maldon's working harbour, with charitable organisations such as Sea-Change Sailing Trust and Heritage Marine Foundation making use of harbourside facilities, local service providers and the history of significant vessel restoration projects. Heritage societies including the Maldon & Heybridge Heritage Harbour Association (MHHHA) and the Maldon Society have already formed connections with each other and make use of the waterfront and Promenade Park for talks and open days incorporating town and harbour heritage. There have also been expressions of interest in situating Maldon's intangible historic associations on the waterfront itself, with Maldon District Council's 'Inter-Tidal Archaeological Survey' suggesting the promotion of relatively unknown local histories to walkers making use of the paths along the mudflats.²¹

The Maldon Heritage Group has created three 'Heritage Walks', one of which incorporates the harbourside and Hythe Quay as 'Maldon's Riverside Trail'.²² This initiative could be extended along the estuary to incorporate Northey Island and Heybridge Basin, further consolidating the connectivity of the waterfront communities represented in the MHHHA, whilst incorporating histories such as Samuel Pepys' HMS Jersey and the Anglo-Saxon fishing weirs at Goldhanger.

The availability of berths in the surrounding Blackwater Estuary, the existing waterside skills and services providers, and the well-developed historic vessel organisations based at Maldon has the ability to support visiting historic vessels. This promotion could be formulated in connection to Maldon's Thames Sailing Barges, as both a primary site of their historic construction and modern restoration, and as the current berthing for a number of surviving craft.

The harbour's Anglo-Saxon, medieval and earlier histories could also be linked to other sites relating to the estuary's pre-modern history, including the Saxon fishing weirs, the Battle of Maldon site, and the variety of late Iron Age and Roman finds near Heybridge. A similar initiative could be implemented relating Maldon's 17th to 19th century history to that of the early-modern imperial wars, promoting the activities of HMS Jersey during the Williamite Wars in Ireland, and later in French hostilities, as well as Horatio Gates' activities in the American War of Independence (1775-83), and the town's connection with George Washington's descendants.

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Maldon District Council, 'List of Local Heritage Assets in Maldon' (2019) and 'List of Local Heritage Assets in Heybridge Basin' (2019)

²¹ 'The Maldon Coast', 37.

²² <https://www.visitmaldon.co.uk/heritage-walks/walk3.php> (Accessed 18/04/22)

Maldon & Heybridge Basin

'Heybridge Basin: an outline history' <<http://www.heybridge-basin.co.uk/Outline%20History.html>>