



Port of Southampton

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<https://www.cruisesouthampton.com/places/ocean-cruise-terminal>

The Port of Southampton is located on the southern Hampshire coast, at the confluence of the Rivers Test and Itchen, and is owned and operated by Associated British Ports (ABP) as the busiest cruise terminal and second largest container port in the UK. The city docks contain the National Historic Fleet vessel *SS Shieldhall*, maintained by a volunteer group and dry docked for survey work in Falmouth harbour, and an exceptional number of maritime skill providers, the majority of which are a considerable distance from the dockside in surrounding industrial district. With the exception of two waterfront locations in the city, Town Quay and Ocean Village, the city's working dockside has been redeveloped and incorporated into ABP's commercial port and cruise terminal.

Brief history of Southampton Docks

The Port of Southampton is located on the southern Hampshire coast, at the confluence of the Rivers Test and Itchen, and is owned and operated by Associated British Ports (ABP). The port today is the busiest cruise terminal and second largest container port in the UK, handling upwards of 2 million cruise passengers and £40b of UK exports every year from its three principal berthing areas of Old Dock, Western Dock, and Container Terminal.¹ The city and docks have seen almost total redevelopment since 1965, when it was redeveloped as a container port on the advice of the Rochdale Committee (1961), with the effect of removing much of the port's historic character and assets. Most historically significant dockside infrastructure has been demolished or built over, while its primary extant working harbour sites at the Town Quay and Ocean Village have seen substantial redevelopment since the 1980s and are currently used by modern yachts and commercial vessels.

¹ <https://www.abports.co.uk/locations/southampton/> (Accessed 23/08/22)



The primary pre-Norman settlements in Southampton were the Roman provincial town *Claesentum* (40AD) and Saxon *Hamwic* (c700-850) located on the eastern and western banks of the River Itchen respectively. Southampton was an historically significant settlement in the Saxon period, being the site of both the royal mint (768-858) and the crowning of the Viking Canute the Great in 1016, after his defeat of the last Saxon king Ethelred the Unready.² The town saw further settlement in the medieval period, largely owing to its strategic location on the south coast, particularly during the Hundred Years War (1337-1453). Henry II ordered the conversion of the castle's wooden keep into a stone shell-keep, and the castle saw subsequent developments after the French raid of the south coast of 1370, including England's first purpose-built artillery fortification in *God's House Tower* (1417).³ Southampton saw further development in the 18th and 19th centuries, primarily as a royal spa town following the discovery of chalybeate water in 1740, and as a commercial centre after the formation of the Southampton Docks Company (1835) and the construction of Southampton Dock (1838-42).

Southampton appears to have been a sizeable commercial dock by the 15th century, with a wool staple house constructed in 1417 for the Flanders-Italy wool trade, and monopolies on exports of tin and lead (1492-1531) and wool (1554) and on imports of sweet wine from the Mediterranean (1554).⁴ It was also a major early modern port for the continent and the New World, serving as the departure point for Henry V and the English armies for Agincourt (1415) and the Mayflower for North America (1620). The city retained this function into the 19th and 20th centuries, serving as the emigrant station for Canada and North America in 1844, and later serving as the departure point for Florence Nightingale for the Crimean War (1853-56), troops for the Second Boer War (1899-1902) and later as No.1 Military Embarkation Port during the First World War. In 1907, it contained the departure terminal for the White Star Line after its relocation from Liverpool, including the RMS *Titanic* in 1912. Much of the city and dockside was destroyed during the November Blitz (1940), which saw the dropping of 476 tons of bombs. Nevertheless, the city continued to play a central role in the Second World War, housing the planning team for Operation Pluto on HMS *Abatos* (1944) and later serving as a troop embarkation point for larger ships, as well as passenger vessels and hospital carriers for the D-Day landings (1944).

Associations and interested parties

Governmental and sub-governmental: The entirety of the working docks area is within the jurisdiction of ABP, while the City of Southampton authorities control the development of the waterfront areas at Town Quay and Ocean Village, and Hampshire County Council hold jurisdiction over the surrounding estuarine region. The whole of Southampton Water, including the waters around the city docks, has been classified as the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA) and RAMSAR site, while the course and mouth of the River Hamble to the south-east of the city is a designated Special Area of Conservation (SAC).⁵ The Dibden Bay Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)⁶ is located to the south of city, while the Lee-on-the-Solent to Itchen SSSI⁷ incorporates the eastern bank of the River Itchen to its mouth opposite the Ocean Village complex. These marine designations protect the estuary waters and its species from over-development and pollution. The city is bordered to the north and west by the New Forest National Park, and the park authorities have included Southampton Water in their Coastal Heritage Project.⁸

² <https://ahgray.wordpress.com/2014/10/05/hamwic-anglo-saxon-predecessor-of-southampton/> (Accessed 24/08/22)

³ <https://www.gpsmycity.com/attractions/gods-house-tower-38768.html> (Accessed 24/08/22)

⁴ <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1604-1629/constituencies/southampton> (Accessed 24/08/22)

⁵ <http://www.solentems.org.uk/maps/> (Accessed 24/08/22)

⁶ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S2000454&SiteName=&countyCode=19&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAAArea=> (Accessed 24/08/22)

⁷ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1005846&SiteName=solent&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAAArea=> (Accessed 24/08/22)

⁸ https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/app/uploads/2018/02/MaritimeFinalDL_TOPRINTversion2.pdf (Accessed 24/08/22)



Historic England (HE) has designated 371 listed buildings in Southampton City, while the City Council has designated a number of Conservation Areas, although none of them incorporate any of the waterfront site, with only the Old Town site containing the area behind Mayflower Park and the Cruise Liner terminals.⁹ The City Council has designated sixteen Local Areas of Archaeological Potential (LAAP), including the waterfront sites of ‘City Centre and Itchen Ferry’ (LAAP8), ‘Swaythling’ (LAAP9), ‘Bitterne Manor and southern St Denys’ (LAAP11) and ‘Weston Shore’ (LAAP14).¹⁰ These areas require assessment for proposed development and planning applications, although these measures appear to have no impact on ABP’s ‘Port of Southampton Master Plan 2009-30’ (2009), which instituted requirements for only “*project level*” consent for changes to listed structures above ground, and notes that “*most archaeological remains...will have already been distributed significantly*”.¹¹

Local interest groups: A number of local interest groups are active in Southampton, although few are involved in the investigation and publicization of its heritage. With the exception of the ‘Historic Southampton’ website and Southampton Heritage Federation¹², the latter not having posted since March 2021, there is limited organised civic action relating to local or maritime heritage. The ‘Historic Southampton’ website is a strong resource for the city’s heritage, regularly posting articles relating Southampton’s historical connections, as well as an interactive map marking the home addresses of *Titanic* crew members immediately prior to the voyage.¹³ The *SS Shieldhall* is maintained by a team of volunteers, and has a significant online presence, with a regularly updated website and social media pages.¹⁴ The city is also home to the City Art Gallery, SeaCity museum with its associated *Titanic* exhibition and Tudor House Museum.

Maritime infrastructure and businesses: Southampton has a high level of maritime skills and services providers registered on the Shipshape Network Directory of Skills & Services, primarily located in the commercial district and surrounding environs. As providers are not concentrated on a single marina area or housed in historic harbourside buildings and infrastructure, there is little current prospect for the development of an encompassing harbourside environment for historic vessels. A sample of the maritime business registered on the Shipshape Network for Southampton include:

- Southampton University Marine and Maritime Institute
- Southampton City College Maritime Technology Centre
- Steamship Shieldhall
- Elephant Boatyard
- Shamrock Chandlery
- Golden Arrow Marine
- Shore Sails
- Swanwick Yacht Surveyors
- Stephen Jones Yacht Design
- Zapcat Racing
- Briwill carpentry and building
- Banks Sails

⁹ <https://www.southampton.gov.uk/whereilive/interactive-map/?layers=3%2C51%2C155&bbox=433554%2C109228%2C450946%2C117773&styles=%2C%2CConservationAreasLabelled&filters=INCLUDE%3BINCLUDE%3BINCLUDE> (Accessed 24/08/22). There is no Conservation Area Appraisal or documentation available for the Old Town Conservation Area.

¹⁰ Southampton City Council, ‘Historic Environment Record – Local Areas of Archaeological Potential’ (2010).; <https://www.southampton.gov.uk/planning/heritage/archaeology-planning/> (Accessed 24/08/22)

¹¹ ABP, ‘Port of Southampton Master Plan 2009-30’ (2009), 116.

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/sotonheritage/> (Accessed 24/08/22)

¹³ <https://historicsouthampton.co.uk/crew/> (Accessed 24/08/22)

¹⁴ <https://ss-shieldhall.co.uk> (Accessed 24/08/22)



- Bainbridge Marine¹⁵

Condition of heritage assets

Existing protections: Southampton Port and City has 371 listed buildings, including 16 Grade I listed buildings, 43 Scheduled Monuments and a Protected Wreck on the River Hamble. While the majority of these are located in and around the city centre, a small number are found in the docklands area, of 19th and 20th century origin. Very few listed structures are related to Southampton’s historic dockside. These include the Grade I listed Water Gate Tower and Town Quay, and the remaining features of the George V and Trafalgar dry docks, American Wharf quay wall, Dock Basin walls and western dock gates 8 and 10, all Grade II listed.

Registered Historic Vessels currently located in the Southampton area:¹⁶

The Port of Southampton authorities have not shown interest in the berthing of historic vessels on the city waterfront as static exhibits, permanent dry-docked vessels, or as visiting vessels. The wider estuarine region has a number of small boatyards and marinas in which historic vessels are berthed, most notably the Elephant Boatyard on the River Hamble. The spatial distribution of these sites across a wide waterway and a number of rivers does not lend itself to the creation of a centre for historic vessel berthing outside of the jurisdiction of the city docks. Hence, while a number of historic vessels are listed on the National Register of Historic Vessels for Southampton, they are neither located within the city dock itself, nor in a central haven for historic vessels outside of the city. The SS *Shieldhall* is a notable exception, being a National Historic Fleet vessel based in Southampton but having to travel to Falmouth, Cornwall for dry docking as no suitable facilities exist closer to home.

Registered vessel	Details
Light Vessel 78 Calshotspit https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/144/light-vessel-78-calshotspit	84ft light service vessel built in 1914 by J.I. Thornycroft & Co of Southampton. Employed as floating lighthouse at Calshot Spit; replaced by buoy in mid-1960s. Moved to Solent Sky Museum in Southampton in 2019.
Range Safety Launch 1650 https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/2797/range-safety-launch-1650	43ft Range Safety Launch vessel built in 1955 by J.I. Thornycroft & Co of Woolston, Southampton. Served with the RAF until 1976.
Steadfast https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/2501/steadfast	45ft harbour built in 1951 by Wiley Manufacturing Co on commission of US Army Department for Transportation. Transferred to Hythe, Southampton in 1956, later sailed as houseboat on River Medway in 1990. Returned to Southampton in 2010.

¹⁵ https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/shipshape-search?search_api_fulltext=southampton (Accessed 24/08/22)

¹⁶ <https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/the-registers/find-a-vessel> (Accessed 24/08/22)



Hotspur IV https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/293/hotspur-iv	64ft passenger ferry built in 1946 by Rowhedge Iron Works Co of Rowhedge
SS Shieldhall (National Historic Fleet) https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/66/ss-shieldhall	268ft sewage disposal vessel built in 1955 by Lobnitz & Co of Renfew. Employed in transportation of sewage sludge from Glasgow to the outer limits of the Clyde estuary.
Gleaners https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/1404/gleaners	52ft fishing trawler built in 1934 by J & G Forbes of Sandhaven.
Dido https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/1581/dido	56ft harbour tug built in 1957 by Isaac Pimblott & Co of Northwich.
Golden Vanity https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/1673/golden-vanity	42ft fishing trawler built in 1908 by Sanders & Co of Galmpton. Used by marine artist Arthur Briscoe. Made several transatlantic crossings in the 1970s. Restored to sailing condition between 1983 and 1988 by Golden Vanity Trust, relaunched into the River Dart in 1988 as youth sail training vessel.
Tahilla (National Historic Fleet) https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/552/tahilla	59ft leisure yacht built in 1922 by J.I. Thornycroft & Co of Hampton. Remained in Admiralty ownership until conversion to cruising vessel in 1948.

Under threat or unknown:

While Southampton has a good associative history, it retains very little historical character or assets in city and waterfront, still less in the way of the working or fixable maritime infrastructure necessary for its use by historic vessels. As access to the waterfront from the city is limited to only the Town Quay and Ocean Village quarters, there has been little consideration in the past, or even awareness, of the connected histories of city and dockside as could potentially be instituted in sites with more accessible and visible waterfronts such as is being planned by Liverpool Museums.¹⁷ The isolation of the dockside sites in relation to the wider city has also rendered those heritage assets and structures highly vulnerable to destruction and degradation through over-development into an exclusively commercial site for modern vessels and commercial interests.

Presently, the city only contains one dry dock (Ocean Quay Dry Dock) which is used by private yachts and commercial ships, while its 19th and 20th century harbourside assets have been demolished, filled in, or converted to commercial use from the mid-1960s. The original inner and outer docks (1842) are no longer extant, being filled in for the Princess Alexandra Ferry Terminal, and converted into the mixed waterfront Ocean Village complex respectively. The White Star Dock, later renamed Ocean Dock, has been demolished and rebuilt as the Ocean Cruise Terminal, while the exceptional art-deco Ocean Terminal building, opened by

¹⁷ Liverpool Museums have recently been awarded £57m for a redevelopment of its three waterfront museum sites (Maritime Museum, International Slavery Museum and Museum of Liverpool), and the Canning Graving Dock. The museums hope to develop the three museum spaces to reflect a more inter-connected narrative of Liverpool's history, relating the history of the city and its population to its maritime history and connections with the global slave trade and post-colonial histories.



Clement Atlee in 1950, was finally demolished in 1983. The 19th century Dry Docks 1-5, including the Prince of Wales Dry Dock (1895), were filled in during the 1960s, while the Trafalgar Dry Dock (1905) was last used for ship repairs in 1989, and also filled in during the 1960s. The George V Dry Dock, opened in 1933 as the largest graving dock in the world, saw its lease terminated in 2005 by ABP, and was subsequently converted into a permanent wet dock.¹⁸

The Maritime Archaeology Trust in their 'Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War' project (2018), recorded the survival of a small number of First World War era assets, at threat of unknowing destruction or degradation without publicization and protection:

*"Although much of the area of Southampton Port used during the First World War has undergone significant changes, there are still opportunities to locate and record traces...Despite the massive volumes of troops that passed through Southampton, the physical evidence of the waterside facilities that made this happen is still relatively little known."*¹⁹

The report discussed the surviving features of original harbour structures removed during the mid-1960s redevelopment of the port, noting that little to no features are still superficially visible. The Outer Dock has only retained its outer walls, which are currently Grade II listed, while the Inner Dock:

*"...no longer exists, having been entirely reclaimed. The sheds, warehouses and supporting infrastructure have also disappeared."*²⁰

The project also investigated the Royal Pier (1833), noting its degradation following its closure in 1979, and that *"The Royal Pier itself is derelict and in poor condition with parts of it missing and the Pavilion no longer exists"*.²¹ The Royal Pier Waterfront is a designated area of development, with city authorities planning for its development into a mixed-use waterfront complex as a *"celebration of the city's maritime spirit"*.²²

The American Wharf, located on the west bank of the River Itchen, is a rare survivor in Southampton docks' recent re-development. The City of Southampton authorities have recognised its *"high degree of cultural, associative and aesthetic values"*, and have designated it a Local Area of Archaeological Importance (LAAI), owing to its potential to yield evidence for a known medieval chapel and tidal mill on the site, along with the likelihood of evidence for mid-Saxon *Hamwic*.²³ In 2009, the city authorities acknowledged the need for *"sympathetic re-use"* of the American Wharf, and that:

*"This area is in need of sensitive regeneration which should focus on the important heritage assets within this character area."*²⁴

However, the site has not featured prominently in city development plans, and the Former Chapel Mills on American Wharf continues to feature on Historic England's Heritage at Risk register in *"very bad"* condition.²⁵ An ABP report on the Port of Southampton drafted in 2009 acknowledge the existence of *"sites of cultural heritage interest"*, but does not appear to have instituted any significant measures protecting the interests of

¹⁸ <http://sotonopedia.wikidot.com/page-browse:docks-the> (Accessed 23/08/22)

¹⁹ Maritime Archaeology Trust, 'Forgotten wrecks of the First World War: Ports and harbours on the south coast during the First World War: Southampton, Shoreham, Newhaven, Folkestone and Dover' (2018), 8.

²⁰ 'Forgotten Wrecks', 14.

²¹ 'Forgotten Wrecks', 10.

²² Southampton City Council, 'Southampton City Centre: The Master Plan' (2013), 16.

²³ Southampton City Council, 'City Characterisation Project' (2009), 279.

²⁴ 'City Characterisation Project', 280.

²⁵ <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/search-register/list-entry/49165> (Accessed 23/08/22)



surviving heritage assets.²⁶ The project appears to have taken the position that as “*most archaeological remains within the developed Port estate will already have been disturbed significantly during the evolution of the port*”, there is little value in instituting requirements for more than “*project level*” consent for changes to listed structures.²⁷ It takes this position even as it acknowledges that:

“The docks and the vessels that use them are characteristic features of the marine and terrestrial landscape of Southampton and the waterside...They are an important part of the identity of the city and its subregion and marine activities attract interest from available viewpoints on the shores of the Test and Southampton Water.”²⁸

While the port authorities refer to the significance of vessel use of the waterfront, this is in relation to modern commercial and recreational craft, and the use of the waters for watersports, and for yacht and dinghy sailing clubs, and does not refer to historic vessels as static exhibits or as visiting vessels.²⁹

Threats and opportunities:

With the exception of two waterfront locations in the city, Town Quay and Ocean Village, the city’s working waterfront has been comprehensively redeveloped and incorporated into a container port and cruise terminal. There is not enough open and publicly accessible space for dedicated permanent berthing and service areas for historic vessels to be situated, nor for an accompanying and easily accessible public viewing platform. There are very few surviving dockside heritage assets, and no area with any distinctive historic character relating the city’s maritime history, nor a specific space with any significant concentration of surviving assets from which interest could be revived. While there are an exceptional number of small shipyards and maritime skills and services providers outside of the city and in the surrounding estuarine area, they could not be developed into an alternative haven or regional ‘hub’ for visiting historic vessels, as they are too widely distributed to offer any central nucleus for development.

The mid-1960s was a significant turning point following the conversion of the docks into a container port, at the expense of a number of historic docks and infrastructure which made the historic docks virtually invisible in the public domain. There are a small number of local heritage interests, including the SeaCity museum, which are interested in investigating and publicising Southampton’s maritime history, as well as higher education institutions which offer courses relating to maritime skills and trades.

Nevertheless, the city does retain nationally significant historical associations and a small number of surviving but threatened historic assets on the dockside, and the potential for further archaeological finds on the shoreline. Its situation as a working dock in the Solent waters should encourage its association with spatially proximate sites and harbours which could empower its own less visible histories.

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²⁶ ‘Port of Southampton Master Plan 2009-30’ (2009), 116.

²⁷ ‘Port of Southampton Master Plan’, 116.

²⁸ ‘Port of Southampton Master Plan’, 118.

²⁹ ‘Port of Southampton Master Plan’, 120.



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