

# Maritime and Coastal Heritage

## Introduction

Sir Neil Cossons *Chairman, English Heritage*

**New responsibilities for marine archaeology and partnerships across the maritime heritage sector are broadening our understanding of the seamless coastal historic resource.**

**T**he archaeology of Europe and the place we now call Britain serves to illustrate our communality with the continent, rather than our separateness, in the millennia before rising sea levels severed us from the mainland, about 10,000 years ago. Since then, being on an island has been central to our identity. One of our most enduring national myths is the idea of the sea-girt fortress protected from invaders by a natural moat, an image that owes much to Shakespeare's John of Gaunt and that has grown stronger with every successful resistance to invasion, from the Spanish Armada to the Battle of Britain. This image is embodied in the landscape by layer upon layer of coastal fortifications – from the Saxon Shore forts of Roman Britain, through Henry VIII's castles and the Martello Towers built as a defence against Napoleon, to Bawdsey and the chain home radar stations of World War II.

Defence, though, is only part of the story. The seas surrounding our coast have served as a highway as well as a barrier for many centuries, and their numerous shallow estuaries have been as much an invitation as an impediment to sea-borne visitors, whether invader, trader or immigrant. These maritime contacts have given England its name and a language and heritage that connect us with places on the other side of the North Sea. It is, for example, no surprise that the vernacular architecture of Great Yarmouth is more like the Netherlands than inland East Anglia. These contacts have also been fundamental to the diversity of our contemporary culture.

The combination of maritime trade and naval power – and they are intimately linked – produced both the Empire and the

Industrial Revolution: a chance combination of circumstances that came together in Britain in the 17th and 18th centuries and changed the history of the world. It is also no surprise that many of the potential new World Heritage Sites identified in England in 1999 relate directly to this period of our history. Liverpool – one of the first to be inscribed by UNESCO – is the supreme example of a commercial port developed at the time of Britain's greatest global influence, its distinctive architecture echoing (and in some cases pre-dating) that of the great cities of the American East Coast. Manchester – the first major industrial city in the world – developed as a result of the cotton trade (and hence indirectly on the back of slavery) and led to the creation of Britain's first industrial canal, the first mainline railway and the first industrial quarter dependent on steam power.

Chatham Naval Dockyard is the supreme example of a royal dockyard from the time when Britain's naval power was at its height and dockyards were the largest industrial complexes in the world. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Cornish mining industry – then



Maunsell Forts, Shivering Sands, somewhere between Southend-on-Sea and Margate. Designed by GA Maunsell, these army forts were erected for defence during 1941–2.

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Fishing boat unloading at Broadstairs Harbour, Kent, 1890–1910. Children play on the tethering ropes while bathers (background) enter the changing booths, which can be moved to the water's edge to allow them to enter straight into the water. Being 'over-dressed' for the beach was not an issue then.

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Victoria Pier, Blackpool, looking west, 1890–1910. The pier opened in 1863 to provide a promenade and entertainment for the increasing number of holiday-makers visiting Blackpool.

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the world's greatest producer of tin and copper – developed new technologies of deep mining that were exported throughout the world. Kew Gardens played a pivotal role in the development of the Empire's natural resources, through the introduction of commercial crops in the colonies and the compilation of many of the world's floras. Even Darwin's home and workplace at Downe in Kent owes its world importance to the deductions Darwin made from his observations during his voyage to the Galapagos on *HMS Beagle* (1831–6).

But heritage, like life, is not all war and

economics. Our maritime heritage also gave the world a distinctive (and distinctively frivolous) type of place: the seaside resort. Starting with George III at Weymouth, the popularity of sea bathing meant that our resorts soon rivalled and surpassed the inland spas of continental Europe. Their apogee coincided with the new mobility made possible by the railway companies that eagerly promoted them. Attracting every shade of social class, from the raffish to the genteel, the seaside alone could be used to write the social history of England over the last 250 years.