

A walk along...

The Stour at Sandwich Haven

Here at Sandwich Haven, the tidal nature of the River Stour means it is an important habitat for birds and other wildlife. The river is fast approaching the place where it flows out to sea – Pegwell Bay – which is itself a place of international importance for nature.

The twice daily rise and fall of the water along this stretch of the Stour has created some special habitats. The plants and animals that live in them have adapted to these changing conditions and to the 'brackish' water (brackish means a mixture of fresh and salt water).

The first habitat is the deep 'intertidal' mud that is exposed at low tide. It may look barren and lifeless but is in fact full of invertebrates like ragworms and cockles. These creatures provide vital food for wading birds, particularly in winter. Species such as redshank, oystercatcher, dunlin and curlew probe the mud with long beaks perfectly evolved for this type of feeding.



Above: Banks of the Stour showing intertidal mud on the left and salt-marsh on the right.



Right: Sea lavender



Redshank

The second habitat is saltmarsh, which is found above the normal tide line and is only flooded during high 'spring' tides. Because it is a more stable habitat, plants can grow here and saltmarshes are home to unique floral communities, with species including samphire and sea lavender. Wildfowl such as shelduck and a variety of waders will feed here.



Reed bunting



Harbour seals in the Stour estuary



Sea holly on sand dunes, Sandwich Bay

A Superb Wildlife Haven

This stretch of the River Stour and its associated habitats are nationally protected as part of a much larger conservation area called the Sandwich Bay to Hacklinge Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The protected area is large - well over 4000 acres - and includes estuarine mud flats and salt marshes, sand dunes, chalk cliffs, grazing marshes and fens. This combination of habitats is unique in south-east England and is home to internationally important bird, wild plant and insect communities. A colony of harbour seals resides close to the estuary.

Some areas are accessible as part of the Sandwich and Pegwell Bay National Nature Reserve - follow the England Coast Path to explore further.

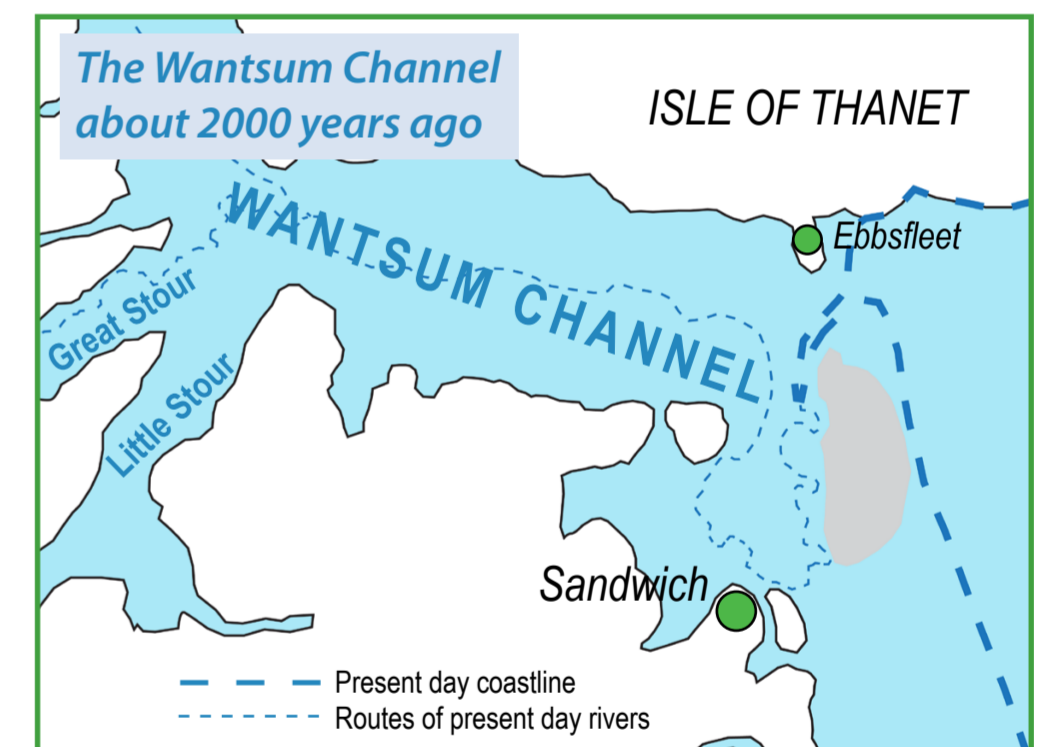
A landscape that was once sea

If you had been standing at this point in the Roman or early medieval period, your view would have been very different! You would not have been standing on the banks of the Stour, but on the shore of a wide sea channel separating Kent from the Isle of Thanet.

The Wantsum Channel was an important shipping route, two and a half miles across at its widest point, but from the 13th century it began to naturally silt up. In 1267 we know there were two narrow entrances at the southern end - at Ebbsfleet and here at Sandwich Haven.

By the early 14th century, Sandwich Haven was also silting up fast. These changes were being accelerated by land reclamation, primarily by the Church. The people of Sandwich reacted angrily, burning watermills belonging to the Abbot of St Augustine's, who they blamed for the threat to their livelihood as a port.

In 1485, the Wantsum was so narrow a bridge replaced the ferry at Sarre. We don't know exactly when the last ships sailed through the Channel but it was probably in the early 16th century.



We would like to thank the Sandwich United Charity for permission to install this panel.

Find more information and download a leaflet about the Stour Catchment from our website www.kentishstour.org.uk



To report pollution: Environment Agency hotline - 0800 807060

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