

## Post Med- Modern Period

### 1) Inheritance

The post Medieval and modern period of the Isle of Wight is characterised by the enormous variation in the types of sites and landscapes. This period is perhaps the most dynamic in terms of the historically mapped social change and technological advances within the context of a rapidly changing socio-economic and political climate. The potential to understand the effects of industry, religion, politics and economics on shaping the landscape as a whole is a rare opportunity in archaeological terms but the advent of GIS and Historic Area Action Plans allows researchers unprecedented access to holistic data. Current political and social attitudes toward cultural heritage from this period are by no means consistent, on one hand regeneration of brown field sites is considered a priority and modern industrial heritage is seen to be an obstacle to economic regeneration but local interest in this period is increased over the last ten years at an exponential rate. The value of remains from the modern period inevitably reflect the changing research agendas of archaeologists and historians, the danger is that the true worth of those remains is only acknowledged in retrospect.

#### **Obvious gaps and biases:**

The most obvious bias when considering the evidence for this period comes from the archaeological investigations themselves. Excavation reports seldom explore the later cultural heritage and often dismiss material from this period as uninteresting.

Until the recent English Heritage funded Extensive Urban Survey little systematic research had been conducted on the Island; the publication of the series of Extensive Urban Surveys does inevitably bias the information toward the Towns included in this works.

#### Nature of evidence base

With 731 sites or finds recorded on the SMR dated to the Modern period and 2048 dating to the Post Medieval, evidence for these periods forms nearly a third of the entire SMR. The majority of the evidence is based on mapping. The defence of Britain Survey was not completed on the Island and therefore this resource is not as useful as it is in other parts of the country.

The majority of the evidence is related to the growth and expansion of the towns; up until recently it was thought that towns such as Cowes did not become developed until the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century; however recent PPG intervention led archaeological investigations suggest that some of the towns main street frontage has its origins in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. By potentially pushing this chronology back, the received interpretation of the origins, and perhaps the significance of Cowes may need to be reconsidered. This is also true of the buildings in western Newport, where buildings listed as being 19<sup>th</sup> century are found to have surviving elements of the early post medieval such as wooden frames with wattle and daub infill.

The industrial heritage of the Island is seldom acknowledged, for example shipbuilding on the Island has been integral to its development but is largely overshadowed by the historic shipyards of Portsmouth and Southampton. The development of concrete industry on the Island at the West Medina Mills site also has implications for researchers across the UK with the early examples of concrete housing in East Cowes.

Perhaps the most important single structure on the Island in terms of surviving Industrial archaeology is the Cowes Hammerhead Crane which appears to be the earliest extant crane in the UK. The crane was erected in 1912 and was originally counterbalanced with a reservoir tank. The significance of this crane lies not only in its remarkable survival but also in the affection by which it is held by the local community; the research potential of this structure is twofold first its significance as an artefact and secondly as a social structure and indicator of identity and of a sense of place.

### **Chronology.**

Chronology of the post medieval period is not an issue however the context and interconnections within that chronology still pose important questions. The effects of large scale military activity across the period needs to be assessed in relation to the rural economy and the corresponding rise in technology based industries. The chronology of change should also be a research priority in that it is important to map influences, possibly the speed of change in relation to known events could provide a useful window into prevailing attitudes and needs of the period.

### **Landscape and land use**

The incredible variation of the geological landscape of the Island has served to produce a disparate but intrinsically linked patchwork of landscapes within landscapes. The chalk downland is comparable with mainland economies with large estates controlling large tracts of land and the resultant communities serving those estates. Whilst the estuarine and greensand have produced altogether more piecemeal development with diverse local industries. The agricultural landscape of the Island is immense in terms of percentage but can also be understood as a model for the development across the country. The “model farms” of Prince Albert around the Osborne estate are remarkable documents of 19<sup>th</sup> century industry. The development of agriculture in response to the Islands varying fortunes during this period would present an important treatise in itself; and research may discount the perceived insularity of the Island.

## **Social organisation**

The social organisation of the Island is of course linked closely to the political and social economics of the period. Research into the effect of trade on the Island economy may produce anomalous results in comparison to the mainland simply because the effect of any economic gain or loss to the island would have significant effects which may be more readily recognised than comparable sites on the mainland.

## **The built environment**

The Island's built heritage comprises a valuable resource contributing to the Island's sense of place, landscape value and historic character. It forms an important part of our tourism offer. Despite its importance both to local residents and visitors, the rural built heritage in particular remains under threat. Recent social, economic and policy changes have raised issues such as dereliction, conversion and re-use. More information on the Island's built heritage is now needed so that curators, individuals and the community can respond effectively to these changes, raise awareness and appreciation of the historic built environment and promote sustainable management.

The built heritage of the Island is of course closely associated with its rural nature, history and landuse; yeoman's cottages and lobby-entry farmhouses predominate the buildings of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, which remained mostly unaltered into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The vast majority of the surviving buildings are of stone and brick- there is very little timber framing surviving on the Island.

It has been suggested that the lack of timber-framed buildings relates to the social structure and the relative lack of wealth during the Medieval and Tudor period. It should be noted however that recently buildings listed as being 19<sup>th</sup> century have been found to have surviving elements of the early post medieval such as timber frames with wattle and daub infill. This should be addressed through further survey and research work.

The local stone (mostly greensand, Wealden Group deposits and chalk) was sourced and this gives villages particular identities based on their geology which remain identifiable today. Rubble walling was common with a particular coursing characteristic of the Island. The Victorians replicated the vernacular in villages such as Shanklin and Shorwell with a picturesque influence. There are of course superior vernacular buildings – the Island has a wealth of interesting manor houses and these employed fine ashlar work and carved architectural detailing, as well as brick. These bricks were also made locally by itinerant brickmakers, although following the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century expansion of coastal towns, the Island brick industry became more permanent with brick kilns established on the edge of Ryde and Cowes amongst others. In the coastal towns, the links to the mainland and an increased influx to Queen Victoria's holiday island encouraged high quality and decorative terraced developments and other large superior housing (mostly decorated with stucco in Ryde and Ventnor) many of which demanded coastal views.

East Cowes and Cowes developed as a shipbuilding town and port and has in parts an industrial nature with warehouses and saillofts and so on. Many 18<sup>th</sup>

century and later properties are roofed with clay tiles. There was also general change in the Island towns towards brick and tile at this time. The predominant roofing material remained wheat straw in the rural areas, although it is not thought that original unaltered thatch survives on the Island. Reed appears to have been employed in the far west and east, presumably due to the accessibility of the marshes of the East and West Yar Rivers. In the rural areas, Queen Victoria's influence also permeated through and secured a better working class housing than was available in the towns.

The majority of the evidence is related to the growth and expansion of the towns; up until recently it was thought that towns such as Cowes did not become developed until the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century; however recent PPG intervention led archaeological investigations suggest that some of the towns main street frontage has its origins in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century( MoLas forthcoming). By potentially pushing this chronology back, the received interpretation of the origins, and perhaps the significance of Cowes may need to be reconsidered. During the post medieval period there appears to be a steady development of key areas of the Island including Cowes, Ryde and Shanklin. This reflects the changing status of the industrial areas and of the sudden growth of the tourism industry in the mid/late 19<sup>th</sup> century

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### **Warfare, defences and military installations.**

The strategic position of the Island has influenced its development to a great extent. The modern period is no exception with numerous tactical additions and expansions of existing sites. Defensive installations of the 16<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> centuries have made a considerable impact on the county landscape. The remains of anti glider trenches criss-cross the prehistoric earthworks of Tennyson Down, whilst coastal batteries remain largely intact and overlooked by development. These monuments to the defence of Britain are perhaps the most emotive class of modern structure to the current generations, as no specialist knowledge is required to engage with them on at least a personal level. Erosion and dereliction are the greatest threat to these resources and the vulnerability of these structures is often assumed to be minimal given their purpose, however, the majority of military

remains from the second world war were not designed for longevity and they are now reaching the end of their ability to remain unsupported for future generations.