

Introduction

Contacts

Queenborough Harbour Office tel 01795 662051 mob 0745 6459754 VHF #08

Queenborough is a small old town that perhaps has seen better days. It is reputed that Admiral Nelson kept a house here with his mistress Lady Hamilton. The town was once an important crossroads for shipping using the now defunct and silted up channels that enabled them to get to Sandwich and Dover via an "inland" route.(see history section).

Positioned as it is near the western mouth of the Swale it has proved very popular with yachtsman and motorboaters for an overnight stop. Regular forays are made from the Benfleet/Southend areas across the Thames estuary to spend a Saturday night tucked up at Queenborough. If on passage up the Thames, it can provide a very useful stopping place without making too much of a detour...

The management of Queensborough Harbour Moorings was taken over from the Council by the Queensborough Harbour Trust in April 2012. This is a "not for profit" organisation with a remit to develop and run the facilities for the benefit of both the local community and maritime users and has various plans afoot to improve/refurbish the existing facilities. They have already moved the Harbour Office from the Town Quay out to Crundell's Wharf (at the end of the All Tide Landing Pontoon) but maintain the same telephone number 01795 662051.

New Plans 2018 They have put out another seven mooring buoys this winter and have plans for another 60 over the next two years (2018/19) They also hope to support the walkway with pilings and install fingers there for drying moorings.

The new addition of a floating jetty to enable a clean landing is to be applauded, as are the provisions of some visitors moorings. Beforehand landing had to be made on a rather long and slippery hard. (Which is still there).

Tucked away out of sight, a drying creek is home to many local workboats etc.

For the visitor Queenborough can supply basic provisioning needs, and a couple of choices for eating and drinking, together with a friendly yacht club, and some local chandlery. Freshwater is available.

This western entrance to the Swale is used by sizeable coasters, therefore it is important to keep the deepwater channel clear for them.

If planning to continue along the Swale towards it's eastern entrance near Whitstable, be aware that you have to negotiate a lifting bridge. It is beyond the scope of this article to cover pilotage of The Swale.

Their website can be found at <http://queenborough-harbour.co.uk/>

Approach

The approach to Queenborough is made after entering the River Medway at Sheerness.

The approaches to the Medway and Sheerness are covered in a different article, the main thing of note is that the whole entrance to the Medway can get very busy with shipping. Sheerness itself is a big ship harbour and tugs are often in use pulling ships off the dock. The point is Sheerness will have to be passed to reach the western entrance to the Swale and due caution is required.

Pilotage Details:

The entrance to the Swale is marked by the Queenborough Spit Pillar Buoy, which is an easterly Cardinal (VQ(3)10s). This needs to be left close to your starboard side. At high water springs you will appear to be within a large expanse of water, but not so. Let the chart be your guide.

Heading south from here you will see Dolphin structures sticking out from the Eastern Shore. The first northerly one shows Q.R, the second one shows Fl.R.4s. These need be left on your port side as there is much foul ground inside of them.

By now you will be seeing heavy moorings on the starboard side, and the newish All Tide Landing jetty on your port side (lit by two fixed red light(ver)). Beyond this on your port hand side a red buoy (Fl.R.3s) marks the end of the old hard and the start of the buoyed channel to Queenborough Creek.

To starboard there lies a concrete barge. **This is no longer available for mooring**

You have now arrived and can seek a mooring.

If you are approaching from the South having traversed the Swale from it's Eastern entrance and passed under the lifting Kingsferry Bridge you will approach Queenborough from the opposite direction. Having come this far you will be well used to the adequate buoyage in the Swale and it is simply a matter of following the channel around until you reach Queenborough.

Berthing

Once in the Queenborough area lookout for yellow visitors mooring buoys on the eastern side...

... before the floating jetty. There are also two large grey buoys near the end of the hard, and these are intended for rafting up on. The Hard extends a long way out, be careful not to foul it.

The moorings in the Swale off Queenborough are now run by the Queenborough Harbour Trust who collect the mooring fees and maintain them. The charge for a visiting boat (2022) on the moorings will be £17.00 per night and £30.00 per night on the pontoon for boats up to 10 metres. You can pay these dues at the Harbour Office (tel no 01795 662051) at the end of the landing pontoon. There are now two Harbour Operators here who cover everything including the trot boat. They are stationed at the Harbour Office (when not in the taxi) and at other times is available on mobile 07456459754 or on VHF Channel 08. They have a website and there you can see what they are trying to achieve as well as good chartlets of the layout of the moorings.

2016 We have added a chartlet of the moorings in our Chart pictures up on right hand side of this page. This chart may be out of date and there is another one on their website

<http://queenborough-harbour.co.uk/>
<http://youtu.be/Y1vB6lRwj60>

The all tide jetty, owned and run by the Queenborough Harbour Trust is for picking up and putting down and taking on water with a maximum stay of 20 minutes. There is provision for visitors to tie up overnight on this pontoon on a first come first served basis; there's 60m of pontoon and they will raft up to 3 or 4 abreast at busy times. Be aware that the southern end of this pontoon (beyond the walkway) is reserved for the Queenborough Yacht club. The all tide jetty has a turnstile and a locked gate at it's inner end and access is via a coded locks and visitors will be given the codes by the HM.

As mentioned before it is not permissible to anchor within the channel, and unless you can take the ground there is very little room to anchor elsewhere and remain afloat. The buoyed channel leading to the Creek also needs to be kept clear. In practice shallow draft craft may be able to lie afloat, esp at neaps to the South of the Hard.

Boats that can take the bottom may be able to arrange with the harbour authority to enter Queenborough Creek by carefully following the buoyed channel that commences near the end of the hard. Within the Creek the Town Quay is normally crowded, but it may be possible to raft outwards with permission.

There is a possibility of anchoring in Loden Hope, which is just round the bend on the northern side, past West

Point, see the chart. You will see two green conical buoys S2 and S3. It may be possible to obtain an Anchorage and remain afloat out of the channel in the area to the north of S3. Obviously this is not ideal for the town.

At Queenborough the tide flows southwards for the first hour after high water. The tidal information we have relates to Sheerness nearby, so there may be slight differences at Queenborough.

Facilities

Water is obtainable either at the head of the hard in Jerry cans or from the floating jetty. They are planning to extend that down to the seaward end of the walkway from the pontoon. Showers are available at the public toilets in the park, and the key to these is held on the ATL

Fuel is not obtainable alongside but there is a garage within half a mile where petrol and diesel can be obtained in Jerry cans with a hike. They also supply both Calor and Camping Gaz refills here.

Drying out and scrubbing off can be arranged within Queenborough Creek, and also there are a couple of Marine outfits capable of repairs.

There is a water taxi running all summer and is free to berth holders and visiting boats

As we have said above, the all tide jetty has a turnstile and a locked gate at it's inner end and you need to get the access codes before you leave to visit the town

The Yacht Club welcomes visitors and is open on Friday and Saturday evenings with lunch on a Sunday. They have showers for which there is a modest fee. We are told that the food at the yacht club is gaining an enviable reputation for excellence!

Trailer sailers can use the public slipway at Queenborough, although it is very long and has a sharp bend in it making it suitable for launching by hand only. The slipway is not managed by The Harbour Trust. It was falling into disrepair but it is believed that there are plans for its refurbishment

The small town can offer basic provisioning including a Co-Op, and a chandlers.

Transport is covered by a railway station which is on a branch line between Sheerness and Sittingbourne. Onward are connections are via Sittingbourne.

What To Do

There is a reasonable choice at Queenborough, although it's only a small place. Apart from Queenborough Yacht Club which is welcoming to visiting yachtsman, there are a three pubs which serve food (One is located right at the top of the hard as you come ashore), three takeaways, a couple of places serving breakfast along with a cafe; and a restaurant.

History

Queenborough is a small town on the Isle of Sheppey in the Swale borough of Kent in South East England.

Queenborough is two miles (3.2 km) south of Sheerness. It grew as a port near the Thames Estuary at the westward entrance to The Swale where it joins the River Medway. It is in the Sittingbourne and Sheppey parliamentary constituency.

Queenborough Harbour offers moorings between the Thames and Medway. It is possible to land at Queenborough on any tide and there are boat builders and chandler. Admiral Lord Nelson, is reputed to have learnt much of his seafaring skills in these waters, and also shared a house near the small harbour with his mistress, the Lady Hamilton.

Queenborough today still reflects something of its original 18th century seafaring history, from which period most of its more prominent buildings survive. The church is the sole surviving feature from the medieval period. The town was first represented by two Members of Parliament in 1572.

Medieval

A fortress, called Sheppey or Queenborough Castle, was built to guard the passage of ships along The Swale upon the command of King Edward III between 1361-1377, during the Hundred Years' War with France. It was built on the site of a much earlier, but smaller castle. This later fortress was a round symmetrical one with 70 rooms, modelled on French-style chateaux of the period; it regained importance in the 16th century under Thomas Cheney, when it is thought to have influenced the construction of nearby Deal Castle and Walmer Castle.

In those days north Kent was divided by open waters and marshes stretching inland. The safest navigation to the open sea was then the route from the Thames into the Yantlet creek (separating the Isle of Grain from the rest of Hoo Peninsula), and thus into the Swale from the Medway estuary, around the landward side of the Isle of Sheppey into the Wantsum Channel, navigating past the Isle of Thanet to Sandwich and only then into the open waters of the English Channel. It was thus an easily defensible planned-town centre for the wool trade.

King Edward III had the town renamed after his Queen, Philippa of Hainault, and conferred upon it the rights of a free borough, with a governing body of a mayor and two bailiffs. He granted Queenborough a charter in 1366 and two years later bestowed the duties of a royal borough upon it.

During this period, Queenborough, on the Isle of Sheppey was an important town for the export of wool, a significant crown revenue. From 1368: "By Royal decree, the Wool Staple was transferred from Canterbury to Queenborough, which, together with Sandwich, became one of the only two places in Kent through which all the exported wool was compulsorily directed."

The castle was excavated in 2005 by Time Team.

17th century

King Charles I had the town re-incorporated under the title of the "mayor, jurats, bailiffs and burgesses of Queenborough", during which time the population was chiefly employed in the local oyster fishery. However the fort having protected the Swale and Medway estuaries for 300 years was never in fact to realise its function as a garrison, and recorded no active military history. After being seized by Parliamentarians in 1650, and being considered unsuitable for repair, being of "no practical use" it was demolished during the interregnum.

Raid on the Medway

Not long after this, in 1667, the Dutch captured the new Sheerness fort (then under construction) and invaded Queenborough. The occupation lasted only a few days; though the Dutch caused widespread panic, they were unable to maintain their offensive, and withdrew having captured the Royal Charles and burnt numerous other ships in the Thames and Medway. Following this raid on the Medway much-needed attention was given to the improvement of the naval defences of the Medway, which at length helped strengthen the economy of Queenborough and Sheppey. Some 300 years later in 1967, The Queenborough and Brielle (the Netherlands) twinning project was established.

19th century to date

The parish church was overhauled during 1690 to 1730, and a number of houses added to the growing town during the 18th century. With the general prosperity of the colonial and mercantile trades of the age, Queenborough

thrived. However early in the 19th century, change was again visited upon the ancient settlement. "Queenborough in the 1850s was a very sorry place indeed; broken down and almost lawless."

With the silting up of the Yantlet creek and the Wantsum channel and improved navigation through the Thames estuary to London, Queenborough began to lose its importance, becoming something of a backwater. Daniel Defoe described it as "a miserable and dirty fishing town (with) the chief traders ... alehouse keepers and oyster catchers".

The Royal Navy eventually became less prominent on the River Medway as other dockyards developed and ships grew in size, so that they were largely replaced by prison hulks which would frequently dispose of their dead charges on a salt marsh at the mouth of The Swale, which was subsequently to become known as Dead Man's Island, and can still be found as such, on local maps today. The new fort and harbour developments completed at Sheerness by this time further replaced Queenborough by being better positioned at the mouth of the Medway.

It is all the same worth noting as evident from records between 1815-20 that the Corporation of Queenborough was in some financial difficulties, owing some £14,500 that it could not hope to pay. It appears that the mayor and other officials had been less than honest in their duties toward the community, with the use of the public money at their disposal. This fraud caused a great financial burden upon the fisherman and oystermen, who were driven to "unlawful and riotous assembly", in protest against unwarranted charges made upon them in the course of their trade.

So serious had this deterioration in conditions become, that by the middle of the 19th century the Corporation was bankrupt, and Parliament was called upon to act, vesting by an Act of Parliament much of the town's business in the hands of trustees who were able to refinance the economy by selling land, property and the ancient oyster fishery. The oyster trade having been corrupted by smuggling and the bribery of the island's Members of Parliament, it lost its franchise in the Reform Act of 1832.

A Borough Charter granted in 1885 gave some renewed impetus to the struggling borough council, but it was not until 1937 that the Charity Commissioners were at last able to appoint a borough council, but the town and its fisheries never fully recovered. The present trustees are Swale Borough Council, which incorporated the old borough council in the reorganisation of 1974. Queenbrough now has a town council, which includes a mayor.

The economy of Queenborough was boosted significantly by the establishment of a branch line from Sittingbourne by the South-Eastern & Chatham Railway which operated in conjunction with a mail and passenger service by steamer to Flushing in the Netherlands. The Swale was bridged when the railway was built in 1860.

From the town's depression in the 1850s there began a process of recovery. New industries came to Queenborough including a glass works and a company engaged in coal washing. Besides these many other small industries developed, including potteries, the Sheppy Fertilizer company (which used the old spelling of Sheppey) and the glue works. The Portland cement works opened in 1890, and there is still a considerable trade in timber.

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