



Queenborough Present and Past

QUEENBOROUGH TODAY

Think of designing a small and beautiful town.

What would you put in it? Perhaps some houses along a main road. Perhaps a mixture of Georgian period houses, they are most attractive, and maybe a few different ones that blend into the street scene. There must be a church, preferably an old one, made of stone or flint with a tower, surrounded by graves and with its own war memorial. If it is a town, it must have a town hall, with a clock hanging out over the street and a pillared entrance and maybe a small museum, to tell the story of the town.

People would need somewhere to shop, and maybe a café or two and a hair dresser. There would be other roads leading off to the railway station and other places. There must be a lovely station, with perhaps some gardens in front and maybe near to the park. Ah yes, the park! This park would be a very special park, one that used to contain a castle – well you could magic back the castle in your imagination.

So where, would this town be situated? Perhaps on an island; - next to a river, with a harbour and a creek, filled with brightly coloured boats. Some of the boats could be fishing boats and others for sailing or rowing. The gardens of the houses on the High Street would back onto the creek and there would be boat builders and other interesting workshops strung out along the wharf.

There should be at least one school and a community centre or two. A path alongside the river and near, yet another park would be a place to watch the boats, walk the dog or just sit on brightly painted benches and watch the world go by. Ancient public houses, perhaps providing food, would be where folk could retire to on winter's nights to while away the hours. During Summer time, families could sit out in the gardens, while children play. To make it interesting, the town should have some history and some tales of dark deeds and heroic happenings.

If this would be your ideal small town, look no further than Queenborough on the Isle of Sheppey.

Queenborough, unlike other parts of the island, is still peopled mostly by of native islanders (Swampies). It is picturesque, quaint and steeped in history.

WHAT TO DO AND SEE IN QUEENBOROUGH

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 CASTLE SITE-From the railway station, walk to the small park opposite. This is the site of the former Queenborough Castle. The nearby old school building has been converted into a community center and café with the local library attached.

THE HIGH STREET AND CREEK- From the corner of the old school the road diverts. The left-hand road leads down to the very attractive creek, with its mixture of fishing and pleasure boats and related industries. The middle road becomes the High Street. -

THE HARBOUR, PARK AND CRUNDALL'S WHARF Following down the High Street you arrive at the sea wall, Elephant Park and the concrete jetty. On the right are some remaining Tudor style buildings housing the Yacht Club and a public house. Following the sea wall along, you arrive at Crundall's Wharf and the All Tide Landing. It is from here that you can take fishing and sight- seeing trips at certain times of the year. It is also a good place to walk and to sit and enjoy the fantastically varied assortment of crafts moored in the harbour. Intrepid walkers can follow the path on to Blue Town and Sheerness, past the many car imports.

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 chandlers in the marina. Admiral Lord Nelson is reputed to have learned many of his seafaring skills in these waters, and also shared a house near the small harbour with his mistress, Lady Hamilton

PLACES TO EAT AND DRINK There are several old public houses some of which also offer bed and breakfast. These are often frequented by visiting yachts people from many nations.

THE BEST VIEWS IN THE AREA- Undoubtedly the best views in the area can be found in Rushenden, from Rushenden Hill. From the railway station, head along Rushenden Road to the end and turn right skirting the water way and up into the park and hill. From the top of the hill you can see in all directions across all three rivers. Follow the path onward to the edge of the Swale and back along to Rushenden Village, ending up in First Avenue and then returning to the railway station.

HISTORY

Why the town was important.

A fortress, called Sheppey Castle 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.

In the past 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 leeward 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 center 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, was an important town for the export of wool, 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"

17th century; King Charles I had the town reincorporated 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, after the Civil War, and being considered unsuitable for repair, being of "no practical use" it was demolished.

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. Work began on overhauling the parish church in 1690.

18th Century



View of Queenborough c.1830.

The parish church overhaul continued through 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.

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.

Economically, "Queenborough in the 1850s was a very sorry place indeed; broken down and almost lawless."

The coming of the railway and the building of the lifting Sheppey Bridge in 1860 did much to enhance the prosperity of the town. There was later a branch line that connected Queenborough to Leysdown and the aviation works and aerodrome at Eastchurch.

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 Sheppey Fertilizer company and the glue works. The Portland cement works opened in 1890..

Many of the old industries have now gone and been replaced by other industries, mostly located in the area of Rushenden. The railway still plays an important role in the lives of local people, especially those who commute to London or the Medway Towns for work.