

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LYMINGTON

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<http://www.localhistories.org/lymington.html>

3th December 2007

SAXON LYMINGTON

Lymington began as a Saxon village. The Saxons arrived in what is now South West Hampshire in the 6th century. They founded a settlement called limen tun. The Saxon word tun means a farm or hamlet. Limen is believed to be a Celtic name meaning either elm river or, perhaps, marshy river. So Lymington was the little village by the marshy river. The name Lymington was first recorded in 689 AD. At the time of Domesday Book in 1086 the settlement was called Lentune.

LYMINGTON IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Lymington was made a town by the Lord of the manor, William de Redvers, in the period 1190-1200 (the exact year is not known). He gave Lymington a charter (a document granting the townspeople certain rights). Lymington was given the right to hold a market. Merchants and craftsmen would come to live in Lymington to sell their goods at the market.

As well as a weekly market Lymington had an annual fair. In the Middle Ages fairs were like markets but they were held only once a year for a few days. People would come from a wide area to buy and sell at a fair. After 1315 Lymington had 2 fairs.

The original settlement of Lymington was a group of huts beside the shore. However the Lord of the manor enlarged Lymington. He laid out High Street, which was made wide to accommodate a market. In 1265 the boundaries of the town were extended as far north as the church to include the Barfields and New Road.

From the Middle Ages until the 19th century Lymington was famous for making salt. It was made from seawater. It was left to evaporate in the sun or boiled in copper pans leaving a salt residue. The salt was then taken by sea to other parts of England.

In the Middle Ages Lymington was a busy port. Wine was imported from France and cloth woven in Salisbury was exported. (Much to the annoyance of the people of Southampton. They resented the competition from Lymington).

In the Middle Ages, in time of war, ports were required to provide the king with merchant ships, which could be easily converted to warships. Ports like Lymington were also required to provide crews for the ships. In 1346 during a war with France Lymington was required to provide Edward III with 9 ships and 159 men.

During the hundred years war which dragged on through the 14th and 15th centuries the French attacked and burned Lymington twice. Once in 1338 (when they also attacked Southampton and Portsmouth) and again in 1370.

The first mention of a mayor of Lymington was in 1412.

LYMINGTON IN THE 16th AND 17th CENTURIES

The French burned Lymington again in 1545. In 1685 the Protestant Duke of Monmouth led a rebellion against the Catholic king James II. The townspeople wholeheartedly supported him. They raised a troop of cavalry who were led by the mayor. However the rebellion was crushed.

In the late 17th century a boatbuilding industry began in Lymington.

In the late 17th century Celia Fiennes the travel writer said of Lymington: 'Lymington is a seaport town. It has some few small ships and some little trade but the greatest trade is by their salterns'. In the early 18th century Daniel Defoe said that all of Southern England obtained its salt from Lymington.

LYMINGTON IN THE 18th CENTURY

By the early 18th century another important industry was flourishing in Lymington - smuggling!

In 1731 a merchant from Boldre called William Cross built a dam across the river, much to the annoyance of the townspeople. He turned the dam into a toll bridge. The river tended to silt up and this was made worse by the dam.

The first freemasons lodge in Lymington was founded in 1764.

In 1738 the first poor house was built in Lymington. The destitute went to live there.

The first theatre in Lymington was built in 1771 in New Lane.

In 1783 a new prison was built in High Street.

LYMINGTON IN THE 19th CENTURY

By the time of the first census in 1801 the population of Lymington was 2,378. It would seem very small to us but by the standards of the time it was a small market town.

The first cricket club in Lymington was founded in 1807. The football club was founded in 1876. The Royal Yacht Club was founded in 1821.

Lymington gained gas street lighting in 1832 and a piped water supply in 1884. Until the middle of the century there was a market house standing in the middle of the High Street. It was demolished in 1855.

In 1836 the first real police force in was formed in Lymington. It merged with the county constabulary in 1853. A fire brigade was formed in 1889.

In 1833 the baths, an open air swimming pool, opened. In 1836 the poorhouse was rebuilt. This time it was called the workhouse and conditions inside were made deliberately harsh to discourage 'idlers' from seeking help.

In 1830 the first paddle steamer travelled between Lymington and Yarmouth. The railway reached Lymington in 1858.

In the early 19th century salt making was still a flourishing industry. The seawater was boiled using coal brought in barges by sea. But in the early 19th century the salt trade declined. For one thing Lymington was further from the coalfields than other places where salt was manufactured and the cost of transporting the coal had to be passed on to the consumer. Then in the mid-19th century mineral salt was discovered in Cheshire, which provided a cheap new source, and the Lymington industry promptly died out. The last salt works closed in 1865.

There had been a boat building industry in Lymington since the late 17th century. From the early 19th century there was a specifically yacht making industry. The population of Lymington was 4,182 in 1851 but it hardly changed in the second half of the 19th century. In 1901 it stood at 4,165. The end of population growth was largely because of the death of the salt trade. But in the 20th century new industries came to Lymington and population growth began again.

LYMINGTON IN THE 20th CENTURY

In 1913 a hospital was opened in Lymington. The money to build it came from voluntary donations.

A new Town Hall was built in 1913. It was demolished in 1966 to make way for the Earley Court shopping precinct.

A cinema called the Lyric was built in 1912. It closed in 1963.

Also in 1913 a fire destroyed 5 houses in Belmore Lane. Disaster again hit Lymington in 1916 when there was a severe flood.

In 1919 the Wellworthy engineering works was founded. It closed in 1989.

In 1932 slum clearance began in Lymington.

In 1941 a furniture shop in St Thomas Street was destroyed by a bomb.

Lymington gained a new coat of arms in 1965.

In 1989 another severe flood affected Lymington.

St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery opened in 1999.

Today the population of Lymington is 35,000.