

Introduction

Folkestone lies a few miles to the west of Dover, and is easy to recognise from sea with its single large breakwater.

This was once an important cross channel port with regular sailings to Boulogne, and indeed the whole history and prosperity of this harbour was based on this requirement alone.

Alas once the Channel Tunnel was completed Folkestone's last hope of being a ferry port vanished. With the withdrawal of the ferry companies in 2000 the whole harbour has degenerated. The deepwater berths were once dredged to 5 m, now all is silting up and the massive outer breakwater has an air of neglect and decay about it. The railway companies had visions of this being a grand terminal, and even today the slightly decrepit looking breakwater is served by rail link that gets enthusiasts all gooey eyed when historic locomotives occasionally call. It also gets the same enthusiasts hot under the collar when plans are made to remove this defunct branch line.

The harbour was purchased from the ferry companies about eight years ago, and plans are being made and put forward to turn it into a marina with shopping and housing etc. Sadly even if planning is granted, in the present economic climate it is unlikely funds will be available to push ahead.

Update 2018. Shoreside development continues here and the railway pier opens during the summer as a sort of amusement facility with lots of entertainment and eateries. There is an ongoing plan for improvement of the harbour for use by yachts but that is a moveable feast. It is intended to dredge the outer harbour and use that material to improve the beaches to the south west of the harbour; but that hasn't happened yet,. We will have to watch developments and see what happens

With the ferries out of the way the somewhat dubious protection offered by the breakwater in westerly weather can enable Folkestone to be used as a passage anchorage. It is obviously of no use in any kind of easterly weather.

For an overnight stop at anchor or waiting for a fair tide to round Dungeness, tucking in behind the breakwater is a possible option. It probably won't be that comfortable however....

Approach

Approaches to Folkestone from the south-west through to the east are basically clear of danger.

Rocky ledges protrude from the coast to the East and West so a good offing will need to be maintained. If approaching close along the coast from either direction it would be very wise to keep at least a mile off in depths of at least 10 m.

From the East there is a very conspicuous hotel that from a distance looks a bit like the deck structure of a large ship. From the West you will sail past the town of Folkestone itself.

In either case the safest approach is made from a distance off with the end of the breakwater (approx 51°04'.557N, 001°11'.716E) bearing between 290° and 305°. More pilotage details:

Tidal streams can run up to 2 kn off the breakwater head. They flow ENE from two hours before Dover HW. At 3 1/2 hours after high water Dover stream sets WSW.

Leave the end of the Western breakwater close on your port side, and be aware that depths will be shelving out fairly rapidly now. Also take note of the rocky ledges that lay a couple of cables east of the entrance to the outer harbour. All of this is very clear on the chart.

If you are intending to anchor in this area it would be worth checking with Folkestone Port Control on VHF channel 15 or telephoning them on 01303 714354. (If that is not manned, ring the Port Office on 01303 254597) This would be to make sure you are not in the way. Although ferries don't call sometimes coasters do. Also if anchoring in the lee of the breakwater you will need to buoy your anchor to avoid getting tangled in any heavy mooring gear from the

days of the ferries. (These were used for hauling off purposes). You will need to display a black ball dayshape and use a riding light after dark. This anchorage is liable to swell, and the holding ground isn't that brilliant either. We are told that no one is quite sure what may be on the bottom in the vicinity of the pier

Closer to high water entry can be made into the drying outer harbour. Keep well away from the root of the big breakwater as there are rocky ledges. All is clear on the chart.

A link to the harbour's website is provided below:

<https://www.folkestoneharbour.com/>

At present the Harbour Authority does not allow boats (other than residents) to dry out within the inner harbour. All boats are re-directed to Dover. Anchoring outside off the arm is allowed, but best check on VHF Channel 15.

Berthing

With a sufficient rise of tide it is possible to enter the outer harbour between the East Pier and South Quay. Basically the Harbour does not provide any facilities for visiting skippers. They quote £25 + VAT for mooring but there are no moorings! There is a trot of moorings rented out to the local yacht club and you could contact them to see if one is spare for a night or so, but that would be a private arrangement with the owner of the mooring and nothing to do with the harbour. Their telephone number is 01303 251574 and there's someone around Tuesday, Wednesday or Friday evenings

This outer harbour dries to 1 m in the entrance, just over 2 m in the centre and over 3.7 m in the North Eastern corner.

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Do not contemplate trying to dry out alongside any of the walls. There are pilings, rebates and plenty of other unpleasant surprises lurking. You won't find local boats doing this either.

Updated March 2021

Facilities

Water is available at the quay, and diesel is available at high water from a pump adjacent to the small boat slipway in the outer harbour.

Folkestone Yacht and Motorboat Club has premises on the Stade (the Northern wall of the outer harbour). When they are open their clubhouse has showers. Telephone 013 03 251574 , a link to their website is provided below:

<http://www.fymbc.co.uk/>

For the trailer Sailer there are two slipways around the harbour, a public slipway is located in the inner harbour... the slipway has access a half the tidal range and there are no charges. If launching from here you have to pass under the railway bridge that divides the harbour.

There is a slipway leading directly into the outer harbour, this is under the control of the harbour authority.

For those that have time to get ashore Folkestone itself has all shops and banks you would expect. There are good

transport connections by rail or by bus. Not much for the boat though, the nearest chandlers being in Dover.

It may well be possible to arrange yearly berthing in the harbour.

What To Do

It is unlikely if you are anchoring off or only spending one night in the outer harbour that you will have too much time to investigate the town.

Should you have cause to be spending a bit longer here with your boat safely on a mooring for instance, we've provided a couple of links below that cover eating and drinking in Folkestone:

Pubs.

<http://www.beerintheevening.com/pubs/results.shtml/el/Folkestone%3BKent/>

Eating Out.

[THE 10 BEST Restaurants & Places to Eat in Folkestone 2021 - Tripadvisor](#)

History

Folkestone's history, as with so many towns in this part of southern England, probably began with the fact of its proximity to the Continent, when groups of Brythonic invaders occupied East Kent. The Romans followed, and after them the Saxons. A Norman knight held the Barony of Folkestone, by which time the settlement had become a fishing village. That led to its entry as a part of the Cinque Ports in the thirteenth century; and with that the privilege of being a wealthy trading port. At the start of the Tudor period it had become a town in its own right. Wars with France meant that defences had to be built here; and soon plans for a Folkestone Harbour began to be made. Folkestone, like most settlements on the south coast, became involved in smuggling during the eighteenth century. At the beginning of the 1800s a harbour became a reality, but it was the coming of the railways in 1843 that proved to be the town's future. With it came the tourist trade, and the two industries, port and seaside resort, were the making of its prosperity until changes in tourist opportunities in the mid twentieth century brought about its present somewhat depleted fortunes.

Folkestone Harbour

Until the 19th century Folkestone remained a small fishing community whose seafront was continually battered by storms and encroaching shingle, making the landing of boats difficult. In 1807 an Act of Parliament was passed to build a pier and harbour; and by 1820 a harbour area of 14 acres (57,000 m²;) had been enclosed. At this time trade and consequently population of Folkestone grew slightly; although the development was still hampered, with sand and silt from the Pent Stream continuing to choke the harbour. The Folkestone Harbour Company invested heavily in removing the silt but with little success. In 1842 the company went bankrupt and the Government put the harbour up for sale. It was bought by the South Eastern Railway Company (SER), which was then building the London to Dover railway line. Dredging the harbour, and the construction of a rail route down to it, commenced almost immediately, and the town soon became the SER's principal packet station for the Continental traffic to Boulogne.

Folkestone Harbour Company commissioned Foster Associates to produce a masterplan for Folkestone which was published in April 2006. The plans envisage rebuilding the harbour as a marina, a "Green Wave" along the sea front

linking countryside west and east of the town, new housing, shops, a performance area and small university campus. The plans link in with the new Creative Quarter. Folkestone Harbour Company belongs to Roger De Haan, former owner of Saga Insurance (see above) and Chairman of the Creative Foundation. The plans take in the land that was previously the Rotunda Amusement Park which has now been cleared.

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