

Introduction

Contacts

Harbour Master 01797 225225 or VHF #14

The ancient town of Rye nestles inland on a hill, lying at least a couple of miles away from the sea.

It wasn't always like this, at one time the Romans used it for exporting iron and the town was built again after 1377 when it was destroyed by the French. The town has the status of a Cinque Port, and looking at it now it's hard to believe that sizeable ships once berthed here. The map displayed in our "Navigation" Gallery shows what it used to be like when it was a thriving port. It's amazing to realise that the headland of Dungeness was once an island.

There is a Martello Tower at Rye village, nearly two mile from the sea!!

The relentless drift of shingle along the coast has moved it's entrance many times, and everything has become silted up. Even now though with the drying bar, and depths within the River at less than half a metre at LWS, commercial traffic still visits.

Apart from the occasional ship visit (approximately 50 year) the harbour is a base for a busy fishing fleet. Visiting yachts and small craft must be prepared to take the ground, and if they are under 15 m long they can berth deep within the town itself, a long way from the sea and with perfect shelter. **They can no longer accomodate boats over 15 metres (In fact I get the feeling that 15m is a bit much)**

The Department of the Environment is the harbour authority here, and apart from the fishing and commercial activity berths are provided for around 300 small craft. A number of yachts have made this their home port, and up to 50 berths are provided for visitors too but you are talking 8 to 10 metres and bilge keeled.

The historic town is picturesque in the extreme, with cobbled streets and historic buildings. You can almost feel the atmosphere from the days when smugglers skulked and lurked among the alleyways.

If you're prepared to give the slightly tricky entrance a go in settled weather, and can take the ground you will find Rye a welcomed change from consumer boating.

The town can provide for most boating needs as well as all provisioning, together with a plethora of antique/junk shops for the browser.

Approach

In settled offshore conditions the yachtsman or motorboater should have no problem finding and negotiating the well marked entrance to Rye Harbour.

Any kind of onshore winds will make things lumpy, and strangers are best advised to stay away with onshore winds of more than F4 or in darkness. If the wind has any north in it the bay and entrance will be well sheltered.

For boats of 1.5m draft an approach should not be made till about 2 hours before HW and entry to harbour ideally made 1 1/2 hours before HW. This will give you time to sort the paperwork with the Harbour Office, and proceed to the Town Berths a couple of miles further in.(In a leisurely manner on a rising tide).
Pilotage Details...

Approaching from the East after passing Dungeness is hampered somewhat by the Lydd Firing Range, show on our approach chart. Firing can take place over 300 days per year, from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM. Sometimes this can be extended to 11 PM.

When firing is taking place red flags or red lights are displayed ashore, and range safety craft will be patrolling. All craft need to keep out this area when practice is taking place, and details can be had on VHF channel 73, or by telephoning 01303 225518/9. For planned firings see:-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/south-east-training-estate-firing-times/lydd-firing-times-february-2022>

Skirt around the range, and approach the safe watermark/fairway buoy when it's bearing NNW.

Approach from the West simply involves keeping at least 2 miles offshore and in depths of over 6 m until you locate the fairway buoy.

The waypoint given in our data is at a safe offing, and close to the red and white fairway buoy.

Submerged gill nets will be found anchored around the bay, with their ends normally marked by Dan buoys. These nets normally have a minimum clearance of 2 m. Keep a sharp eye out.

As mentioned before there is the possibility of commercial traffic in the very narrow channel. The harbour office displays international three light traffic signals from a mast on it's roof, and these are only switched on at times of ship movements. In addition to the standard lights an orange flashing light will also be displayed.

Therefore in your approach keep a sharp eye out for the signals and be prepared to clear out the way should you see three red lights vertically arranged together with the orange flashing light. (No entry to the harbour). Also bear in mind that a ship could be coming up behind you. Green/white/green displayed vertically means that you must not enter the harbour without specific permission. Sometimes all small boat activity is suspended for 20 minutes while ships manoeuvre.

The best plan for the stranger is to call "Rye Harbour Radio" on VHF channel 14, or telephone 01797 225225 before you approach too close. A link to their website is also provided below where you can download a very useful visitors guide:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rye-harbour-passage-pilot-and-mooring-information-for-boaters>

Ed Note:- that document has last year's (2021) prices

The most important thing for a stranger to realise about this harbour is that the flood tide in particular can run hard, up to 5 kn. Also two training walls run either side of the channel. These will be submerged at high water and are marked by beacons, so it is essential to stay within the channel. To further add to the fun there can be strong eddies in the closer approach, inside the longer West Groyne. This has been known to deposit a ship under the control of a pilot on to the training wall itself..... As long as the approaching mariner is aware, keeps sufficient way on his vessel, and applies corrective helm all should be well.

The general approach is made from the red and white fairway buoy (LFI.10s), nearly 2 nm to the SSE, with the leading line into the harbour being on 329° true. A red painted tripod beacon marks the end of the Western Groyne (LFI.R.7s), which is now an AIS transmitter, and somewhat further inland a conspicuous square structure painted green with noticeboard marks the end of the Eastern Training Wall. (Q.9.15s). (Interesting mark; green with a triangle top mark and a white West Cardinal Mark lighting??)

In your approach from the fairway buoy keep the entrance wide open. Once within the channel proceed inland, on your port side you will see blue buildings, and on your starboard side the conspicuous harbourmasters office. Immediately past this office on your starboard side lies the timber Admiralty Jetty. Visitors need to round up and secure to this Jetty.... bear in mind the flood tide can run very hard. You don't want mooring antics of the cringingly embarrassing kind right under the gimlet eye of the harbourmaster.

The training walls end in the vicinity of the Harbour Office.

Report to the harbourmaster ashore and arrange your berth. Most boats under 15 m will opt to proceed a couple of miles further and berth deep within the town, where the quay can provide a soft mud bottom, so that even fin keeled boats settle in it. Other berths are available on the Admiralty Jetty outside the harbour office. The bottom here is firm. Take advice from the harbour master.

Speed limits are 6 knts, and considerably slower passing moored craft. Anchoring is not allowed except in emergencies.

Berthing

After paying harbour dues and getting some inside information from the harbour master...

... most boats make for Strand Quay deep within the town. These berths lie about a mile a half away from the harbour office. **There is nowhere for boats over 15 metres to tie up in Rye Harbour** Charges (2021) are a combination of mooring fee, harbour dues and VAT and have been simplified in comparison to previous years; it will now cost £20 a day for boats up to 10m but that includes access to the showers and toilets on Strand Quay and shore power

Note this is a drying harbour, not suitable for larger boats .

River Rother and Town Quay Details...

The River Rother is well marked by beacons and meanders somewhat. The sides of the channel are generally steep to, but at high water the covered mud flats give the impression of far more water than there really is. Follow the beacons (check out the photo gallery).

About a mile away from the harbour office lies the junction between the River Rother and the Rock Channel. The River carries on in a straight line, and is shortly blocked by a bridge. Visitors need to take the Rock Channel, which lies to port.(see photo gallery).

The entrance to the Rock Channel, is marked by a pair of small red and green buoys. Do not swing to port too early, but make your turn when the gap between these buoys opens up as a shoal radiates outwards.

Keep to the centre in the Rock Channel for a half a mile further. At this point it is necessary to swing starboard to approach the Strand Quay, and the best water will be found outside of the bend. The inside of the bend is shallow.

Keep centre channel again and pick up a berth on Strand Quay on your starboard side. This quay consists of steel piling with vertical timber fendering. Ladders are provided every 15 m or so. There are plans to install a pontoon at Strand Quay but at the beginning of the 2016 season these were still in their compound and awaiting funds for their installation.

Most of the berths here have a soft mud bottom, but some have mud over shingle. Keelboats should be prepared to lean against the wall in case they sit down on the latter. The harbourmaster's advice should be sought about the best spots for your particular boat. Be aware that the bottom slopes away from the wall; a wise skipper would "see the boat down" whatever keel he has or he might find the leap from the boat to the ladder a leap too far; I've also known a bilge keeler to sink asymmetrically under those conditions and had to use a lea board to stay in the bunk!!

Once safely installed imagine how in years gone by multiple sailing ships would be berthed roughly where you are now. Imagine the French sailing right in here, burning the town and stealing the church bells !! Rye reeks of history.

Facilities

Water is available at Strand Quay and at Admiralty Jetty. Showers and toilets are available at the harbourmaster's office and at Strand Quay in the town. Electricity is available at both locations and included in the mooring fee.

Fuel is available, tide permitting, in the Rock Channel. There is also a garage at Strand Quay, and gas is available here. For the boat there are a few yards that can deal with repairs located at the town.

Trailer Sailability can use the ramp at Rye Harbour Village. This lies opposite the harbour office and adjacent to the lifeboat station, and is available from about 2 hours before high water to 3 hours after high water. The charges are £10 a day or £88.60 for a year, pay the harbourmaster. Jetskis can use this ramp but must observe the speed limit and head out to sea, rather than head inland.

Right next to the ramp is the sailing club, link provided below:

<http://www.rhsc.org.uk/>

The town can provide all normal facilities with shops and banks. Provisioning should be no problem, despite the fact there are no enormous supermarkets. On Wednesdays there is a farmer's market. A fish market on the Strand, and a pukka butchers will be found as well as a delicatessen and bakeries. There is a launderette in town too.

As already mentioned there are numerous small interesting shops selling junk/antiques as well as a museum and a library.

Bus connections to nearby towns.

What To Do

You won't go hungry in Rye. There are all kinds of eateries from tea rooms through fish and chips to Italian..... not forgetting Indian and Thai restaurants too.

With more than a dozen pubs, all within walking distance the thirsty Mariner should have no problem finding one to his tastes...

As usual it is beyond the scope of this article to delve too deeply, so we provide a couple of links below for your perusal:

Pubs:

[http://www.beerintheevening.com/pubs/results.shtml/el/Rye%3BEast%20Sussex/Eating Out](http://www.beerintheevening.com/pubs/results.shtml/el/Rye%3BEast%20Sussex/Eating%20Out)

[THE 10 BEST Restaurants & Places to Eat in Rye 2023 - Tripadvisor](#)

History

The small town of Rye, in East Sussex, England, stands at the confluence of two rivers, although in medieval times, as an important member of the Cinque Ports, it was at the head of an embayment of the English Channel, almost entirely surrounded by the sea. It is officially a civil parish but with its historic roots has the status of a town; it has a population of 4009 (2001 census). During its history its association with the sea has included being involved with smuggling gangs of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Those historic roots and its charm make it a tourist destination, and much of its economy is based on that: there are a number of hotels and restaurants, as well as other attractions, catering for the visitor. There is small fishing fleet, and the Harbour has facilities for yachts and other vessels. A known Demonym for the people who live in the town is 'Ryer's' and in Sussex they are sometimes referred to as 'Mud Heads'.

Until the end of the Wealden iron industry (and probably in Roman times) Rye was important as a place of shipment and storage of iron, especially armaments. Camber Castle was built by Henry VIII, one of five built to protect this coast.

The medieval map shows that Rye was then located on a large bay: the River Rother (not shown) took an easterly course to flow into the sea at Romney. The town was to become a limb of the Cinque Ports by 1189, and

subsequently a full member. The violent storms of later centuries (particularly the 13th) were to cut the town off from the sea; and, when the River Rother (which had by now changed its course) and the sea combined in about 1375 to destroy the eastern part of the town, ships began use the current area (the Strand) to off-load their cargoes. In the same century the town wall was completed as a defence against foreign raiders.

Constant work had to be undertaken to stop the gradual silting-up of the river: Acts of Parliament had to be passed to enable it to be kept navigable. Even so, Rye was considered one of the finest of the Cinque Ports. With the coming of bigger ships and larger ports, Rye's economy began to decline, and fishing and particularly smuggling became more important. Imposition of taxes on goods had already encouraged the latter trade since 1301, but by the end of the 17th century it became widespread throughout Kent and Sussex, with wool being the largest commodity. When luxury goods were also added, smuggling became a criminal pursuit, and groups - such as the Hawkhurst Gang who met in the Mermaid Inn Rye - turned to murder and were subsequently hanged.

Since 1803 there have been lifeboats stationed at Rye although the lifeboat station is now named Rye Harbour. The worst disaster in its history occurred in 1928, when the vessel (the The Mary Stanford of Rye) sank with all hands. The incident is recorded by a tablet at Winchelsea church; and by the folk-song The Mary Stanford of Rye . Between 1696 and 1948 there have been six ships of the Royal Navy to bear the name HMS Rye.

Geography

Rye is located at the point where the sandstone high land of the Weald reaches the coast. The medieval coastline (see map in photo gallery), with its large bay, allowed ships to come up to the port. The original course of the River Rother then reached the sea at Romney to the north-east. The storms in the English Channel in the thirteenth century, coupled with reclamation of the bay, brought huge quantities of gravel through longshore drift along the coast, blocking the entrance to the port. The course of the river has also changed over the centuries, so that Rye now stands on the river, at the point of its confluence with the River Tillingham.

The river itself, now flowing southward into Rye Bay, and the environs of Rye Harbour, are managed and maintained by the Environment Agency.

Most of the town lies on the original rocky heights and contains the historic buildings including St Mary's parish church, the Ypres Tower (part of the Town Wall), Lamb House and many of the houses on Mermaid Street, Watchbell Street, and Church Square. The main road skirts the town to the south after crossing the river; before that point there is some ribbon development along the Hastings road.

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Interesting link to local history:

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