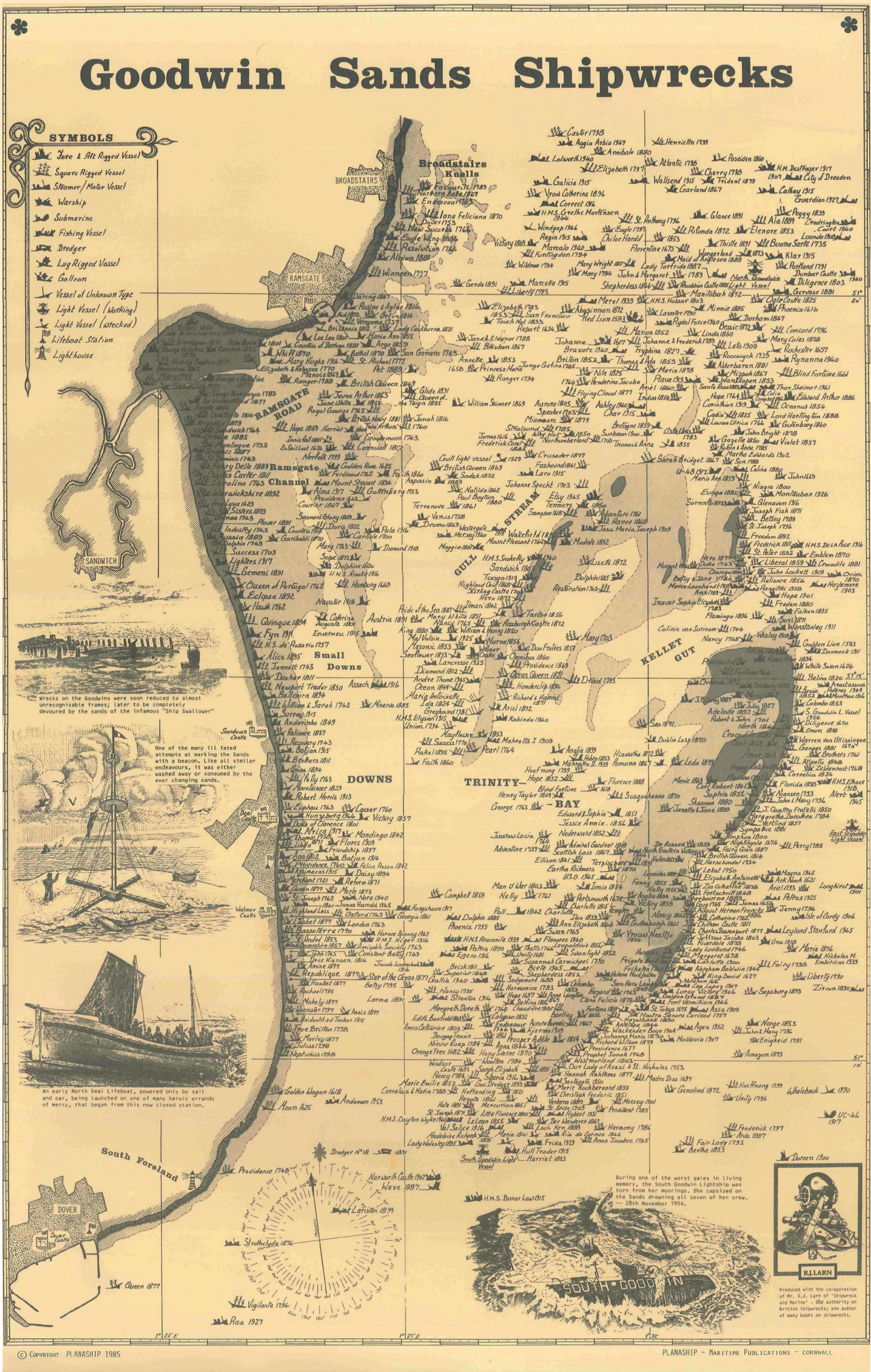


GOODWIN SANDS HERITAGE AND HISTORY

EARLY HISTORY

Seven and a half kilometres out to sea from where you are standing lie the Goodwin Sands, a series of sandbanks stretching for about 16 kilometres between Ramsgate and South Foreland. It was thought a great flood in 1099 AD covered a former island called Lomea or Low Island, one of three which lay off the East Kent coast, the other two being Richborough and Thanet (both now part of the county's mainland).

Folklore claims that the resulting sandbanks were named after a local feudal landlord Earl Godwyn, though more modern opinion suggests the name came from the Anglo Saxon 'göd wine' meaning 'good friend'.



Goodwin Sands shipwrecks
Photo: SDL Imports

SHIPWRECKS

Situated in the busiest shipping lane in the world, the Goodwin Sands have posed a navigational hazard to mariners for centuries. Known as the 'shippe swallower', the sandbanks are a graveyard of over 2,000 ships. Ironically they also provide shelter in the form of The Downs anchorage – an area of calm water created by the sandbanks that lies between the Goodwins and the shore. After the harbour at Sandwich silted up in the 16th century, The Downs came into their own and at the height of the Age of Sail some 800 ships would have moored here.

The earliest record of a shipwreck was in June 1298, when ship owner William Martyn appealed to King Edward I to investigate a claim of plunder near Sandwich. However, it is extremely likely that shipwrecks from much earlier, perhaps even from the Roman invasion of 55 AD, lie buried in the Sands.

The Great Storm of 1703 claimed the lives of about 1,200 sailors with the reported loss of 130 vessels that had been sheltering in The Downs, including four Royal Navy warships *HMS Mary*, *Northumberland*, *Restoration* and *Stirling Castle*, all now listed as Protected Wrecks. Other Protected Wrecks lying in the Goodwins are the *Rooswijk* and the *Admiral Gardner*, two East Indiamen that foundered on the Sands in 1740 and 1809 respectively. In 2005 an Anglo-Dutch diving operation recovered a significant amount of the *Rooswijk's* cargo of silver bullion, which was duly returned to the Dutch Government.

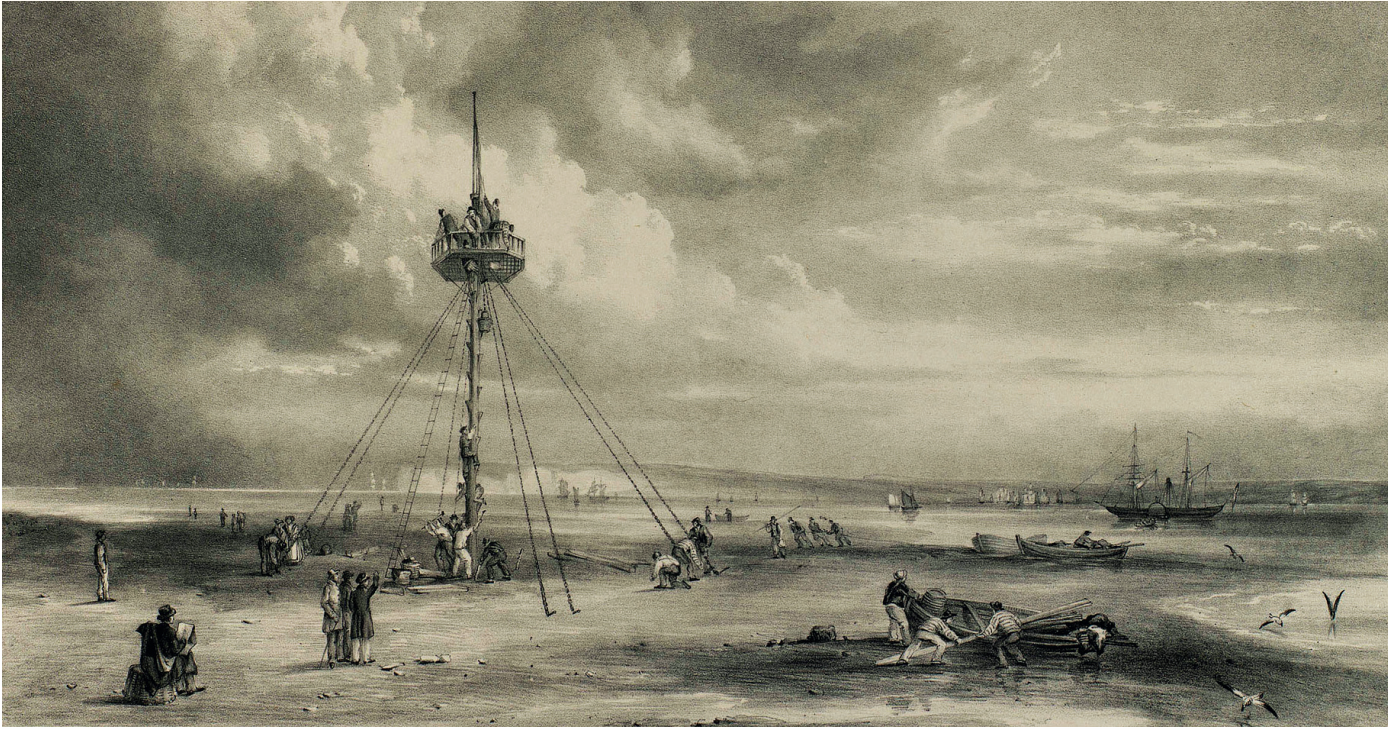
Between 1801 and 1802, Admiral Lord Nelson often visited his fleet waiting in The Downs, staying at the Royal Hotel on Deal seafront. His body, pickled in French brandy, lay on *HMS Victory* which was anchored there in December 1805 following his death at Trafalgar, whilst awaiting fair weather to continue to London for a state funeral.

NAVIGATION

Despite claiming so many ships, the Goodwin Sands had no navigation marks until the end of the 15th century when a simple warning beacon was installed at North Foreland near Broadstairs. Dutchman Lucas Janszoon Wagenaer drew the first chart showing the position of the Goodwins in 1583 and in 1634 two lighthouses were installed at South Foreland to create a transit line across the Sands' southern tip.

The earliest lightship marking the eastern edge of the Sands was put in position in 1795. By 2020, the East Goodwin lightvessel, nine cardinal and nine channel markers safeguarded shipping from the treacherous Sands.

In 1840 Captain (later Admiral) Bullock attempted to erect a warning beacon and place of refuge on the Sands themselves, complete with supplies of water and fresh food. It remained in place for two years before being run down by a Dutch ship. A second beacon was swiftly erected but after being destroyed in a storm it was never replaced.



Captn Bullock's Safety Beacon
Photo: Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2020



Recovery of a Dornier Do 17 from the Goodwin Sands 2013
Photo: RAF Museum

WORLD WARS

During WWI The Downs anchorage proved to be of great importance to the Dover Patrol. Tasked as they were with protecting the Dover Straits, they found the area a perfect base for inspecting supply vessels en route to London. Between 1915 and 1917 a reported 121,707 vessels entered The Downs to be checked for contraband and enemy subjects. The Dover Patrol paid a heavy price for their commitment, with nearly 2,000 personnel killed in action.

Collisions, lurking German submarines and mines were responsible for the recorded loss of 80 vessels around the Goodwins throughout both World Wars. One tragedy was when the tug *Char* was run down at night by the steamer *Erivan* and sank with the loss of all of its 17 crew.

The German submarine U-48 was sunk on the North Goodwin sandbank during WWI with the loss of half its crew. It appeared from the sand several decades later, only to be reburied within a few years. Two more German submarines, the midget *Seehund* and U-16 were also sunk in the area in WWII, again with significant loss of life.

Owing to the presence of several WWI airfields in East Kent, it is considered highly likely that both British and German planes were lost around the Goodwins.

Research by the Kent Battle of Britain Museum reveals that scores of aircraft crashed in the area during WWII, including B17 Flying Fortress bombers, Dorniers, Hurricanes, Messerschmitts and Spitfires, with the loss of over 100 aircrew. Some of these crash sites are still visible on the seabed today. One of the young airmen lost was Pilot Officer Keith Gillman from Dover, who aged 19 was photographed for a now-famous Picture Post cover published just one week after his death in August 1940.



One of the Few -
Pilot Officer Keith Gillman 32 Squadron RAF
Photo: TI Media/Fox Photos/Getty Images

POST WAR

During a storm in 1954 the South Goodwin lightvessel was tragically lost. Its seven crew were never recovered; only an official visitor monitoring migrating birds survived.

In 2013, the remains of a German Dornier 17 bomber that crashed into the Goodwins in August 1940 were raised from the seabed; this is now undergoing intensive conservation at RAF Cosford in Wiltshire.



Loss of the South Goodwin lightvessel 1954
Photo: Lighthouse Digest

ART AND LITERATURE

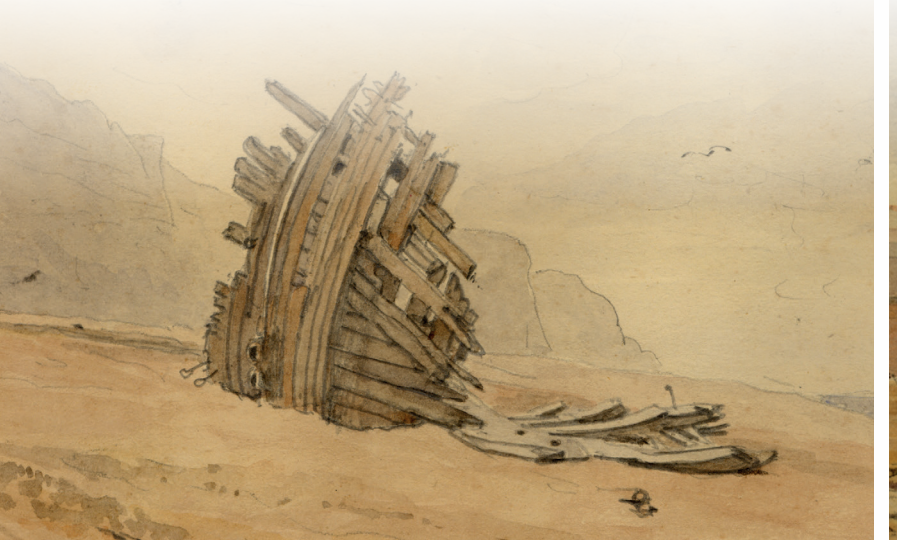
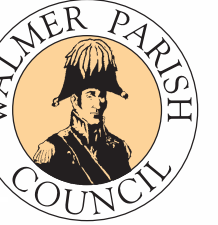
The Goodwin Sands have inspired artists and writers for centuries. Whilst living at Margate in the mid-18th century, J.M.W. Turner painted two beautiful watercolours of the Goodwins – *Cricket on the Goodwin Sands* and *Wreck at Sunset*. Paintings by E.W. Cooke, William Edward Frost, W.H. Macklin and W.L. Wyllie RA also combine to create a rich visual tapestry of this famous maritime landscape.

Poets W.H. Auden, William Canton, G.K. Chestersfield and Judith Nicholls have all written about the Sands. The car in Ian Fleming's famous children's story *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* landed on the Goodwins and the author also referred to them in his James Bond novel *Moonraker*. Hermann Melville mentioned them in *Moby Dick*. Daniel Defoe's defamation of the Deal boatmen following the Great Storm of 1703 caused a furore when his booklet *The Storm* was published in 1704. One of the most well known references to the infamous Sands was in *The Merchant of Venice*:

'The Goodwins, I think they call the place;
a very dangerous, flat, and fatal
where the carcasses of many a tall ship lie buried'

William Shakespeare

Funded by Deal Town Council, Dover District Council, Goodwin Sands Conservation Trust
Kent County Council, The Roger de Haan Charitable Trust, Walmer Parish Council



GOODWIN SANDS

ECOLOGY AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The Goodwin Sands play a significant role in our local marine environment. They are about 16 kilometres long and vary in width from 1.6 – 3.2 kilometres. At their deepest, the sandbanks descend for 25 metres and large expanses of the top three metres are exposed for about an hour twice daily at low tide. Strong tides and currents swirl around the banks, constantly moving sand from one place to another. Divers often report that a shipwreck exposed at one tide can easily be covered by a metre or more of sand by the next.

By absorbing the energy of storm waves pounding onto them, the sandbanks act as a vital sea defence against the long-term erosion of the East Kent foreshore. At low tide on a windy day these waves can be seen as a line of white spray along the horizon.

The only significant piece of research on the dynamics of the sandbanks was undertaken by R.L. Cloet in 1954. He concluded that the Goodwins are a 'closed system' in that no great quantities of sand move either in or out; rather the sandbanks pivot on a NE/SW axis in an anti-clockwise direction, a conclusion that has been borne out by successive seabed surveys.

MARINE LIFE

The Sands create a beneficial spawning ground and nursery for fish such as Dover sole, herring, sea bass and skate, which in addition to whelks are caught by the inshore Thanet fishing fleet based in Ramsgate.

Surveys by the Zoological Society of London show that as many as 450 grey and 180 harbour seals have been found hauled out to rest on the Goodwins after hunting for food, though not all of them will be there all year round. Only the harbour seals actually breed on the Sands, as the pups need to swim from just a few hours after birth. Each year the grey seals make the long trek to the beaches of Norfolk and Lincolnshire to give birth.



Seals enjoying their haul out site
Photo: Julian Sims

MARINE CONSERVATION ZONE

Designated in 2019, the Goodwin Sands Marine Conservation Zone covers 277 km² of a dynamic and constantly changing area of sand and coarse sediments overlying a chalk base. These sediments are now Protected Habitats, providing for a wide range of micro-organisms as well as sand eels, Ross worms and Blue Mussels that all form integral parts of the food chain.

Also protected within the Conservation Zone are the features of the English Channel outburst flood, a Megaflood that occurred approximately 200,000 years ago. Additionally, moderate energy rock habitats that support a range of fragile species are to be conserved.

The conservation objectives of the Goodwin Sands MCZ are to maintain the subtidal sand, coarse sediments, Blue Mussel beds and the outburst flood features in a favourable condition. Also, the rock habitats and Ross worm reefs are to be returned to a favourable condition.



Sand eels
Photo: Keith Mutch



Kayakers and dog 2016
Photo: Dave Herriott



Hovercraft and cricketers 1995
Photo: David Chamberlain

RECREATION

There is something truly surreal about standing on an enormous sandbank in the middle of the English Channel – a fact that has long made the Goodwin Sands a favourite destination on a calm summer's day.

The first recorded cricket match took place on the Goodwins in 1813 followed in 1824 by another organised by the Ramsgate harbourmaster. Kent County Cricket Club's 1st XI played a Select Thanet XI there in 1985 but the tradition lapsed in 2006 when a BBC crew filming a match had to be rescued by the RNLI.

Rowing boats then hovercraft used to take day-trippers out to the Sands to picnic, play golf or cricket, ride a bike or just enjoy the scenery. Modern modes of transport include kayak, sailing boat, Rigid Inflatable Boat and even helicopter. In 2019, a group of experienced Channel swimmers completed an inaugural swim to the Goodwins, taking five hours to swim the 15 kilometre distance from Ramsgate to Goodwin Knoll to Deal.

The Goodwins can still catch out the unwary as the tide rises up swiftly through the sand itself. In minutes one can be standing ankle deep in water with the sand turning into a glutinous mass, ready to suck those caught off guard into its depths.



Intrepid cyclist on the Goodwins 1906
Photo: Deal Museum



Derived from out of copyright Ordnance Survey mapping and updated from original sources. © Dover District Council 2017

This is one of a series of Historic Village Information panels that can be found in most of our villages in the Deal district. There are also Historic Town panels in Dover, Deal, and Sandwich. Historic Town Trail leaflets can be found online at www.whitecliffscountry.org.uk

Further information can be obtained from Dover Visitor Information Centre 01304 201066, Dover Museum 01304 201066 and www.goodwinsands.org.uk

Research and photographs supplied by the Goodwin Sands Conservation Trust and Dover Museum
Designed by Dover District Council Creative Design Services

