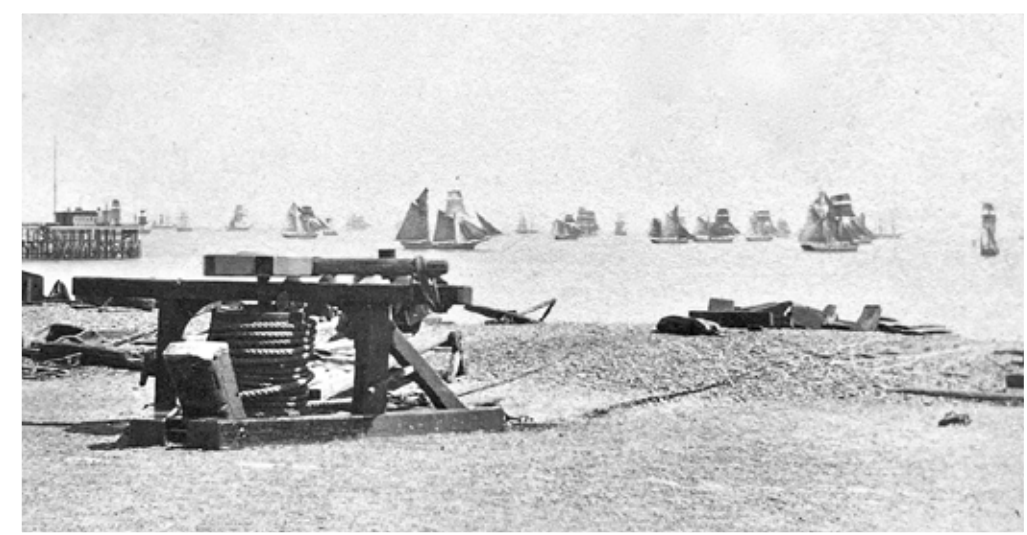


MARITIME DEAL

The Downs

Situated 8-10km (5-6 miles) west of the Goodwin Sands, Deal's coastal position has historically provided a living from the sea for much of its population. The Goodwin Sands shelter a stretch of water between the sands and the shore, known as The Downs. In the days before steam, sailing ships including large naval and merchant craft would lie at anchor here. They would wait for favourable wind and sea before completing their journey to London or to destinations around the world.



Credit: Colin Vorrall

Vessels at anchor and sailing in The Downs, in the 1880s. The capstan (in the front of the photograph) would have been used for hauling boats up the shore.

The Deal Boatmen

From the 17th until the early 19th centuries, the ships needed a range of services from the land. There were no docking facilities at Deal, and so local boatmen provided the link between them and the shore. The Deal boatmen supplied ships with essential equipment, stores, and food and water for their often long voyages. Supplies included flour, bread, beer, vegetables, fruit and other necessities. The boatmen also embarked and disembarked passengers and took goods from the



dz1043

This photograph from around 1910 shows a bumper catch of herrings.

ships onto the beach. In the 1800s, the post office paid the Deal boatmen £2,000 a year to collect mail from the ships.

The Deal boatmen swept the waters of The Downs for 'slipped' anchors, which were cut loose by ships when they became entangled in wrecks or in the sands. This was known as 'hovelling'. The anchors were taken to the anchor fields and sold by auction.



dz2982

A good catch at Deal. Freshly caught fish were sold on the beach in Deal and were laid out for all to see.

Smuggling was also a way of life for many, and the Deal boatmen were heavily involved in this illegal activity. Starting in the 17th century when the export of high-quality English wool was taxed, smuggling reached its height in the 18th century when the whole town of Deal seemed to be involved in 'running' spirits, tobacco, tea, lace, silk and fancy goods. Smuggling was so important to local people that when the government finally clamped down on the practice at the end of the Napoleonic wars, many people were reduced to poverty.

Pilots

The boatmen of Deal were renowned for their skill in negotiating the sea between the coast and The Goodwins and also for their vessels (cutters) which were specially adapted for these short but hazardous voyages. The treacherous waters

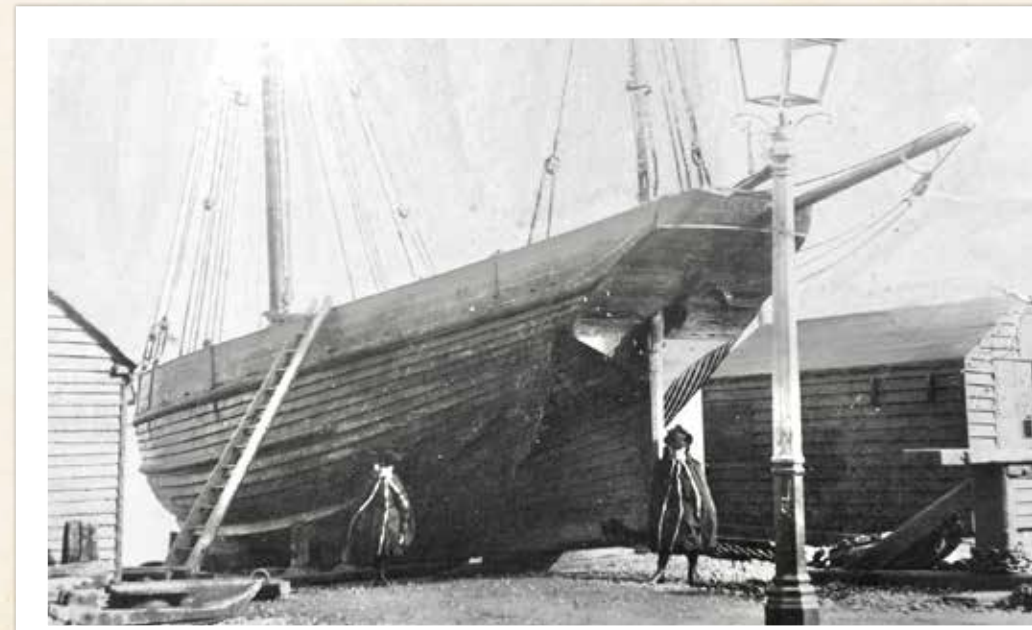
around the sands, and the shifting deep-water channels, demanded seafarers with specialised local knowledge. This gave rise to the Cinque Port Pilots, local men who were paid by ships' captains to provide guidance through unfamiliar waters. The pilots also created the sea charts for the coasts on both sides of the Channel.

Boat building

The major naval presence in Deal stimulated all forms of maritime activities. The most important of these was boat building.

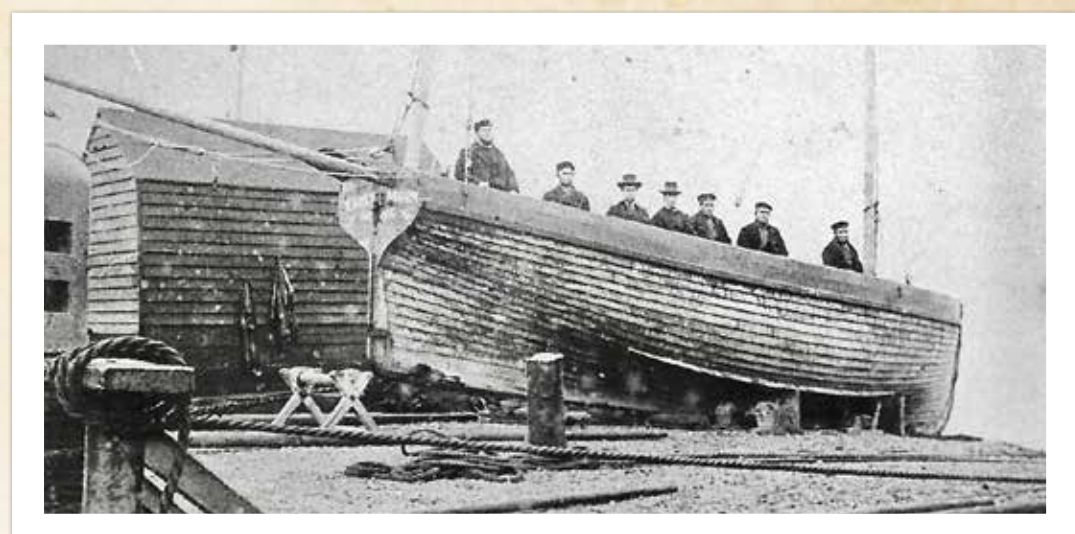
In 1740, and for the next 50 years, all cutters were built in Deal itself. Other craft such as luggers, yachts and ten-oared galleys were also built. As late as 1847 there were still six boat yards in the town, even though the trade was declining by then. The last vessel was built in 1896, in Nicholas' yard at the north end of the town.

As Deal only had a shelving beach and no harbour facilities, the boat yards were situated as close to the shore as possible. The remains of Hayward's yard still stand as a house and workshop at the junction of Wellington Road and the High Street, at the landward end of South Street. The central strip of South Street was cobbled to act as a slipway, and finished vessels were hauled along it into the sea.



Credit: Colin Vorrall

One of the Deal luggers. Each boat could carry around ten tonnes of goods.



Credit: Colin Vorrall

A Deal lugger called Early Morn. This photograph may have been taken after the vessel and crew rescued 24 sailors and passengers from the steamship Strathclyde that had been run down by the steamship Franconis off Dover on 17th February 1876.

Changing industries

The boatmen of Deal continued sailing their cutters until the middle of the 19th century, when they and their vessels were replaced by steam tugs. The first steam tug appeared in The Downs in 1840. Steamships made anchorage in The Downs redundant, the ending of the Napoleonic wars brought about the closure of the Naval Yard and smuggling was severely curtailed. With the decline in work for the Deal boatmen, many families moved to New Zealand and established a town there called Deal.

Fishing and tourism became important. The fishermen's catch was sold on the beach and hundreds of nets laid out to dry in the streets. Later, there were two canning factories in North Deal to process the catch. The building of the sea wall meant the boats moved from their plot at North Deal down to this location.

From the 1840s, pleasure boat steamers took tourists on trips along the channel and these continued until the 1970s. Fishing for anglers is still carried on today.

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