EAST COWES

Together with Cowes, forms part of the River Medina gateway to the island. East Shambord, as it was known in the 13th century, was originally more important than West Shambord, although settlement was minimal. Under constant threat from the French, King Henry VII built castles on both banks of the Medina to guard the river, although the 'East Cowe' is now gone. East Cowes became important as a customs clearance port in the 16th and 17th centuries and in the 18th century began to build its reputation as a major shipbuilding centre. Once the engineering industry arrived here it stayed, with Saunders Roe, Westland, British Hovercraft Corporation and GKN all making use of its tailor-made industrial sites. East Cowes is also, of course, noted as the favourite home of Queen Victoria, who lived at the splendid Osborne House, in complete contrast to the industrial endeavours taking place at the bottom of the hill.

A FLOATING BRIDGE has been a feature of Cowes since 1859, running on chains which are stretched from one bank to the other. The present ferry, the eighth, was built by Fairey Marine of East Cowes and launched in 1976. She has travelled more miles than any of her predecessors. As you leave the chain ferry stop and check out the East Cowes poetry stone.

THE GRIDIRON SHED was used to build boats for hundreds of years and the first seaplane was launched from here in 1913. The SWS on the wall stands for ‘static water supply’, used by firemen during bombing raids in World War II.

TRINITY WHARF is the former Trinity House Depot servicing the lighthouses of England and Wales. All lighthouses are now automatic. The depot closed in 2005.

LOCKS LANE is one of the last remaining alleys of its kind in East Cowes. Most other lanes of this width in the area have been redeveloped for industry or car parking.

COLUMBINE YARD - an amazing example of British industrial architecture built by Saunders-Roe in 1955 specifically for constructing flying boats. Before WWIII the firm specialised in manufacturing power boats and record breaking craft such as Sir Malcolm Campbell’s Bluebird. They also developed the Princess Flying Boats and, after 1945, helped to develop the British Ballistic Rocket ‘Black Knight’. It was also here that Sir Christopher Cockerell pioneered designs for the world's first hovercraft. Inspiration is said to have come from a coffee tin, a kit-ekat tin, a hairdryer and a pair of scales!!

VICTORIA BARRACKS were built in 1872 to house troops to guard Queen Victoria. Luckily the impressive railings around the parade ground were not taken for recycling during WWIII as the barracks were in use.

COASTGUARD COTTAGES were built in 1881 and sold in 1924. East Cowes was the customs post for the Island and all duties were paid here. The original post was in the town centre and William Arnold, father of Rugby School head Matthew Arnold, was customs officer until 1801.

CAVALIER PROPELLER is from HMS Cavalier, built at the J.S. White’s East Cowes Yard in 1944. She was the fastest ship in the Royal Navy for 27 years. The nearby fountain was given to East Cowes by Miss Shodden of Springfield in 1896 and stood originally in York Avenue.

SITE OF ROPE WALK is just in front of the present caravan park. This is where hemp rope was twisted and prepared for use on ships that were probably beached here for repair. The rope walk and beach are featured on the 1783 Admiralty Chart.

CAMBRIDGE ROW TERRACE is a beautiful row of houses that were nearly not completed due to lack of money. However a second builder finished them in 1870.

THE OLD WASH HOUSE was an important part of life at Coastguard Cottages, as it was here that the women would meet to do their laundry and catch up on local news.

HENRY VIII FORTIFICATIONS - the last remnant may be seen in this old wall. The East Cowe (or castle) was commissioned by him at the same time as the West Cowe (now the Royal Yacht Squadron) as part of his Solent Defences.

NO BARRIERS is the first ever open air art gallery of its kind, transforming the blue hoardings currently surrounding the East Cowes Project site. This unique and expanding exhibition showcases work produced by the community of East Cowes.

ST JAMES’ CHURCH was designed by John Nash and dedicated by Princess Victoria in 1831, although the dedication stone has since disappeared. Nash is famous for designing Regency streets and Buckingham Palace in London. His tomb is beside the church tower. He lived in the now demolished East Cowes Castle, just up the hill.

FRANK JAMES HOSPITAL was built in memory of Frank James, a yachting enthusiast who was killed by an elephant while hunting in West Africa. His brothers gave the building to the town in 1993 as a home for aged seamen. Ten years later, it became a cottage hospital. Frank’s yacht, Lancashire Witch, is featured as a weather vane.

THE METHODIST CHURCH was opened in 1878, in response to the growing congregation, as Wesleyan preachers came to the island. The chapel was damaged by bombs in WWIII and two windows given by Queen Victoria were lost.

FALCON YARD was one of the most prolific of J.S. White’s shipbuilding yards on the river, producing destroyers and other vessels for the Royal Navy and other fleets. Badly bombed on the night of 4 - 5 May 1942, it is now owned by GKN.

THE HERITAGE CENTRE was set up by local historians who keep it open from 10am-1pm Mon-Sat. If you want to learn about the heritage of the town, the Centre is packed full of fascinating information, local history displays and books for sale. Look out for their new heritage information boards positioned around the town as you walk the East Cowes part of the Trail.

THE UMBRELLA TREE is a weeping ash, with a shady seat beneath and has stood in this spot since 1914. Look out for its sister tree on the Green in Cowes.

THE TOWN HALL was completed in 1897, funded by Amy White, the wife of J.S. White the shipbuilder who so influenced the shape of the two towns. It is currently being refurbished and is home to a host of community activities, clubs and exhibitions.