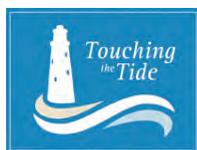


# Battling the Elements: Southwold's Changing Fortunes

A thousand years of history

Sarah E Doig



## Introduction

**In August 2014, a programme of archaeological excavation of test pits was carried out in the Suffolk coastal town of Southwold and the adjacent village of Reydon.**

As with all the Touching the Tide Archaeology projects, a key element of this was the involvement of members of the local community, many of whom enthusiastically dug a series of 1 metre square test pits on their properties under expert

supervision. As well as providing new evidence of the development of the locality from the prehistoric era through to the present day, it provided motivation for residents to increase their knowledge of, and interest in, their local, shared heritage.



This booklet aims to present the main findings of the 2014 excavations in the context of the existing, well-documented history of Southwold. There are already a number of excellent, published historical accounts of the town. The aim of this publication is to complement and to supplement

these, focusing on how the changing coastline, upon which Southwold lies, has affected its work and play over the centuries as well as how the administration of the town and its industry has had to adapt to the various challenges and opportunities it has faced.

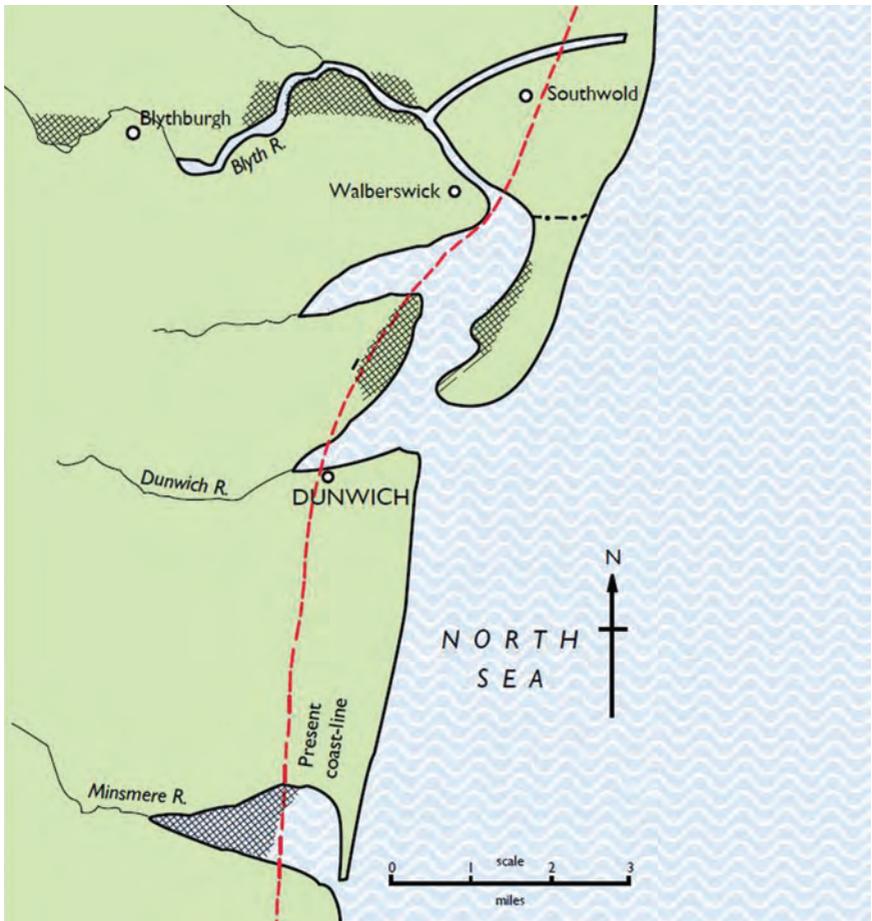


## Sudwolda

**The town of Southwold sits on the north east Suffolk coastline, roughly midway between Aldeburgh and Lowestoft. Southwold's neighbour, Reydon, lies inland to the north west.**

The two parishes are separated by Buss Creek, which flows from the River Blyth and which encircles Southwold. The coastline has been subject to constant change due to erosion and storms, and the probable shape of the coast in the eleventh century – at the time of

Domesday Book – was very different from the line we see today: at this time Southwold was almost an island. These dramatic changes to the coastline have presented both opportunities and challenges to the town's community, and have profoundly affected its prosperity.



Probable 1066 coastline

Over the years, and during the recent digs, worked flints have been found in the locality of Southwold and Reydon; almost everywhere in lowland England will have a scatter of flints from the Neolithic (stone age farming) and Bronze Age.

### Prehistoric finds from the test pits

The dig found little evidence of human tools prior to the Neolithic period, and only a few scattered worked flints from that era. The first real evidence indicating human settlement dates from the Bronze Age (burnt flint) - the distribution of which may suggest that such settlement was concentrated immediately to the north of Buss Creek, and on the higher parts of Southwold, between the Common and Gun Hill.

These people almost certainly lived in small settlements of some kind, but as yet no occupation sites have been found nearby. The Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon remains that have been found are also, so far, scattered and sparse. It is however the Anglo-Saxon name for Southwold, "Sudwolda", meaning "south forest or wood" which is recorded in the 1086 Domesday Book. This is the first surviving documentary record of the town. It tells us that there were just nine family groups in the parish; probably around 60 people in total. In contrast, eleventh century "Rienduna" (Reydon), meaning "hill where the rye is grown", had sixty-two families. It also had two

churches whereas Southwold had none. No fishermen are mentioned in Southwold at this time, although two tidal fish weirs are. There clearly was a small fishing fleet based here, though, because the villagers were obliged to give 25,000 herrings a year to their Lord, the Abbott of Bury St Edmunds. The following couple of centuries saw a significant shift in fortunes for Southwold, and it is during this time that one main settlement emerged. This is backed up by findings from the recent test pit programme during which sherds of pottery from the high and late medieval periods were unearthed. During the 1200s a small chapel was built and the town gained rights to hold a weekly market and an annual fair. This points to a growing population. However, in 1327 there were still only twenty-one taxpayers recorded (less than half of those in Reydon).

### Finds from the High Medieval (mid 11th - mid 14th centuries)

Six of the sixteen pits excavated in Southwold & Reydon produced more than a single sherd of medieval pottery, indicating significant population growth during this period. The proportion of finds from the two settlements was almost exactly in line with the Lay Subsidy (taxation) data for 1334, which records that Reydon contributed 56% and Southwold 43% of the total sum paid. Small amounts of Scarborough ware were found, demonstrating trading links up and down the east coast of England as far as Yorkshire.

But then Southwold's luck changed. Down the coast to the south lies Dunwich which had, by the thirteenth century, become one of the greatest east coast ports in England and one of the ten largest towns in the country. Its wealth was derived from trade, shipbuilding and the town's large fishing fleet, due to the large harbour, the "Kings Fleet", which was sheltered behind a shingle spit extending south from Southwold. However, the east coast was struck by three major storms in 1286 – 87, which extended the spit to block the harbour mouth. This spelled the beginning of the end for Dunwich and the beginning of the rise of Southwold.

In 1328, another huge storm struck the Suffolk coast causing the coastal shingle bed to shift. It washed away a significant part of Dunwich town, causing great loss of life and blocking off its harbour completely. Further storms followed in 1347 and 1362. Helped by Southwold and neighbouring Walberswick residents, the Blyth and Dunwich rivers were diverted through a new cut across the shingle spit, north of Dunwich. In parallel to Dunwich's decline, Southwold began a steady rise in status and in its economy, aided further by a Royal Charter in 1490 granting them the right to provide safe haven for the King's ships. The rising town's financial future was confirmed when William Godell, a rich local

merchant, left the bulk of his estate to the "Bailiffs and Commonality of Southwold" in 1509. By 1524, the number of Southwold taxpayers had increased to 115 as opposed to just thirty in Reydon.

### **Finds from the Late Medieval period (mid 14th - late 15th centuries)**

Less pottery was found than for the previous period (possibly indicating population decline following the Black Death), but the proportion was almost the exact reverse of the high medieval figures (Southwold 54%, Reydon 46%), indicating that Southwold was now becoming the larger and more important settlement. This of course ties in with the granting of Southwold's Charter in 1490 and its gaining control of the harbour from its old rival Dunwich. The distribution of the pottery also indicated that both places were expanding beyond the boundaries of the earlier settlements.

An Elizabethan gentleman called William Camden visited East Anglia in 1578 in preparation for the first ever geographical and historical survey which he published under the title "Britannia". This is how he described the town:

Southwold as depicted in 1588



© Extract from "Soulde – its fortress", a watercolour and ink illustration on vellum dated 1588, held at The National Archives in Kew.

*"Southwold lieth in the plain, full against the open shore of the sea. A town well enough frequented through the benefit of an haven that the river Blith, emptying itself there into the sea, maketh, and at every high water it is so environed with the waves that it seemeth to be an island, a man would wonder that it is not overflowed."*

His last remark, with the benefit of hindsight, was rather prophetic.

## Maritime Southwold

**The coast of East Anglia has long been vulnerable to both sea and wind erosion and to tidal surges. The bay on which Southwold stands was once protected by two promontories; Easton Ness to the north and Dunwich Ness to the south.**

However, these have long since disappeared leaving the beach and cliffs of the town exposed to the elements. James Maggs was a Southwold schoolmaster and auctioneer and from 1818 to 1876 he kept a chronicle of local events, recording the fortunes and (more often) misfortunes of the seafarers, small tradesmen and others who were his fellow townsmen. He records many natural disasters including this one in 1827:

*“An extraordinary high tide... The walk from Gun Hill to New York Cliff lost from 6 to 7 feet in width... A boathouse used by the Preventative Service standing upon the beach near New York Cliff was entirely swept away.”*

Each storm or tidal surge over the years swept away fishermen's huts and boat sheds from the beaches and caused damage to the cliff face. In 1906, just three years after the timber sea defences had been renewed, part of the cliff path was washed away.

The town is bounded on the east by the North Sea, on the south by the River Blyth and across the northern diagonal by Buss Creek, so the risk of flooding is extremely high. In fact, it has happened with monotonous regularity, most notably in November 1887, January 1928 and February 1938. In January 1953 an unusually high tide coincided with a deep depression and gale-force northerly winds. These factors combined to send a tremendous surge of water funnelling round from Scotland into the North Sea. The result was one of the worst floods in living memory along the whole of England's east coast with a dreadful loss of life totalling 358. In Southwold five people died as the surge swept inland to the north and south of the town, turning it into a virtual island for two days and nights. People, and animals, houses and caravans, were washed away, and low-lying bungalows were submerged.



On 9th November 2007 the town feared another disaster as an exceptional spring tide was forecast to coincide with a freak storm surge. In the event, the coast received a spectacular battering but luckily the tide and the surge

were separated by three hours and Southwold residents and property escaped with only minor damage. The most recent surge was in December 2013 which, again, did not cause any major losses to property.



Although the coast upon which Southwold stands is free from navigational hazards in the form of rocks, sudden storms, shifting sandbanks and poor seamanship have all resulted in many shipwrecks. Nineteenth century records reveal

283 wrecks in the bay. One of the best known of these incidents is the loss of the London registered Princess Augusta which was stranded and completely wrecked near the shore in 1838. She was a new ship returning from St



**The wreck of the Princess Augusta in 1838**

Petersburg, Russia, laden with hemp and linseed. The dramatic scene of townsfolk helping to rescue crew and cargo is immortalised in a print which hangs in Southwold museum alongside the figurehead from the ship. Over the years all sorts of craft

have been wrecked off the town's coast including warships, schooners, steamers and tugs. The twentieth century saw a dramatic reduction in shipwrecks due to better boats and improved navigational aids and skills.



The loss of life from shipwrecks and boats finding themselves in trouble on the seas off Southwold dropped dramatically with the introduction of the lifeboat service. This was an initiative driven by the residents' fears that their fishermen were being put at increasing risk: the boats and their crews were often involved in attempts to rescue people from sinking and stricken ships. And so the Southwold Lifeboat Society was founded in 1840 with the aim of raising £400 to establish a lifeboat, which was launched the following year. This vessel was crude by modern standards and was powered by a combination of sail and oars, but its crew were still able to save many lives. The last of these sailing lifeboats was the *Alfred Corry* which had a crew of eighteen men. Between 1893 and 1918 it was launched forty-one times and won numerous awards for bravery. A museum housing the *Alfred Corry* and celebrating the history of the Southwold lifeboat service stands close to the present RNLI Lifeboat Station.

The Southwold lighthouse has become perhaps the single most memorable structure in the town. At nearly 31 metres tall it dominates the skyline. The light from the lantern was visible 17 nautical miles away and was a highly effective aid to navigation along the east coast. Construction was started in 1887 after a nearby light at Orford Ness was destroyed by gradual erosion and then a severe storm. The lighthouse became operational three years later. The location, beside the coastguard station, was hailed by the local press as "very advantageous... the smoke from the town will not obscure the light and its nearness to the cliff must make it very prominent all along the coast." It is still an important landmark and navigation aid today, despite the rise of GPS, and was even upgraded in 2013 when the last Orfordness lighthouse was decommissioned. The lighthouse is open for tours - you can get a superb view of the town from the top! Details of opening times are on the lighthouse website.



## Governing Southwold

**To a large extent, the success and prosperity of Southwold over the centuries has been due to the town's independence from local and central authority control.**

In 1490, King Henry VII granted Southwold a charter, making it a "free burgh" with an elected council which, in turn, elected bailiffs to govern the town. The Borough of Southwold had the right to set its own regulations (including, importantly, for trade) and hold its own courts (and therefore levy fines and order imprisonment in its own gaol). The town also had rights over its maritime boundary and benefitted from duty levied on ships and some salvage rights for ships which foundered off the coast. The town's official seal, depicted on the modern-day town sign, bears the motto "Defend They Ryght" (defend thy right) which aptly sums up how seriously Southwold's governing body has taken its responsibilities over the centuries. Although Southwold lost its status as an independent municipal borough in the local government reforms of 1974, it continues to have an elected, non-political town council. Other present-day, civic appointments include the "Bellman"; the Southwold equivalent of the town crier.

The borough charter also renewed and expanded Southwold's rights to fairs and markets; an important way to bring in revenue from outsiders. Two weekly markets were established and two fairs were authorised. These rights were still being used in the 1730s when John Kirby visited the town and recorded in his "A Suffolk Traveller":

*"It has a tolerable market weekly on Thursdays, indifferently served with provisions; and two fairs yearly, one on the Monday after Trinity Sunday, and the other 24 August being St Bartholomew's Day."*

### **Evidence from the Post Medieval and later**

Most of the pits produced sherds of post medieval pottery, and the total volume was more than three times that for the high medieval period, with Southwold continuing to demonstrate that it was by now a more important place than Reydon. A single fragment of Cologne Stoneware (made in the Rhine valley of Germany from the 17th century onwards) confirms the evidence of other finds in the Museum collection that there were trade networks across the North Sea, linking Southwold to Germany. A number of domestic pottery wares were also recorded from farther afield in England, including Staffordshire and Essex.

Three quarters of all the post medieval pottery was Victorian and 20th century in origin - as might have been expected.

As far as food is concerned, bone fragments were found of domesticated animals such as cow and sheep, and of wild species, but none of the test pits yielded any fish bones. This was surprising, given the importance of the local fishing industry.



Today, a market is still held on Monday and Thursday and the Trinity (or Charter) Fair, combining the two fairs granted in the charter is today held on the May Bank Holiday. Long-held custom dictates that the mayor and town councillors process around the fairground on South Green before taking a ride on one of the attractions. In the past, the merry-go-round was the favoured ride but in recent years the dignitaries have preferred the dodgems.

One of the undisputed challenges Southwold's governing body has had to face in its history was the devastation of the town in a great fire in April 1659. The flames, which had started on East Cliff, were fanned by the onshore winds. In the space of

just four hours, the majority of the tightly-packed, timber-framed houses as well as the town hall, market buildings, shops and warehouses were razed to the ground. Parliament declared the town a disaster area and donations for the stricken townspeople flooded in from across Britain. Despite an understandably slow recovery from such a tragedy, the town did rise from the ashes like the mythical phoenix. The huge rebuilding exercise, however, provided an opportunity for an improvement in the town planning. By incorporating a number of green, open areas into the new design, natural fire breaks were provided. The result is the elegant, spacious Southwold that we see today.

## Looking back, looking forward

**The 2014 test pitting certainly sparked a lot of interest. There was a significant sense of community benefit, with the participants scoring the experience very highly and valuing their new insights into Southwold and Reydon's heritage.**

More than 50 people gained new archaeological skills as a result of this community dig, several of who have continued to participate in field walks and other related archaeological activities. The test pitting followed a standard

methodology so the results can be put together with those from more than 60 other towns and villages across East Anglia to help to build up a regional picture (see <http://www.access.arch.cam.ac.uk/reports> for more details).



## Southwold at work

**Southwold's position on the east coast of England has meant that over many centuries, many of the townspeople have been able to derive their living from the large shoals of herring which moved along the coast between September and December.**

Evidence for a substantial herring fishery in the medieval period is found on local trading tokens on which herring are depicted. Surviving wills and rental agreements demonstrate that herring fishery was the predominant

industry at that time. The herring season was overlapped with that of sprats, the other fish caught in numbers by the local boats. This was still the case when the writer Daniel Defoe visited Southwold in the 1720s. He recorded:



*"This is a small port-town upon the coast, at the mouth of a little river call'd the Blith: I found no business the people here were employ'd in, but the fishery... for herrings and sprats; which they cure by the help of smoak"*

The fishermen in Southwold, however, also had to contend with constant difficulties with the harbour being regularly silted up in bad weather, and therefore its access was restricted. The

borough was unable to afford to carry out the necessary work to stabilise the harbour and so it relinquished control to a new body of Harbour Commissioners, set up by a 1746 Act of Parliament. The locally-appointed Commissioners raised enough funds to erect piers and to secure the mouth of the harbour. The flourishing fishery was also boosted when Southwold became the base of the Free British Fishery. Although the company only operated in the town for just



over twenty years, it improved both Buss Creek and the harbour still further. It also did much to expand local supporting trades such as shipbuilding, rope making, blacksmithing, net making and salt manufacture.

The nineteenth century saw further problems with the silting up of the harbour after bad weather. White's "Directory of Suffolk 1844" recorded Southwold as a sea port with thirty-seven coastal vessels, bathing place and fishing station. It had thirty-three master mariners. Even with a plentiful supply of fish, a large catch was considered remarkable enough for James Maggs to record in his diary on 20th October 1850:

*"This morning and until about 11 o'clock strong wind from the N.E. About 11 the wind abated when a large shoal of herrings were observed in the bay. Boats and nets were immediately in request and I witnessed that in the course of 4 or 5 hours £100's worth of herring were landed. There would have been more had the boats been larger, as the nets so soon as cast into the sea sank with the quantity of fish."*

The trade transacted through the harbour at this time was the export of corn and malt and the import of



coal. But this activity all but ceased in the second half of the 1800s and the Harbour Commissioners were disbanded, leaving facilities in a state of disrepair. Aided by the government funding, the harbour was rejuvenated at the turn of the century with the aim of persuading the Scottish herring fishery and curers to use Southwold. This proved successful, albeit short-lived. In 1909, 761 fishing boats, including a large number of Scottish boats, used the harbour. To prepare the catch, Scottish girls came down to gut and pack the herrings. Many fish were cured in brine, packed and exported to Europe. The girls stayed for the season in town and some fussy landladies would line the walls of their houses with paper in order

to keep at bay the grease and the smell of fish! Sadly, the Southwold fishing trade essentially died with the outbreak of the First World War.

The fishing industry supported many other related trades in the town, upon which they relied for supplies. Sail making flourished in the nineteenth century with sail-lofts filling the upper floors of many houses. Rope making, however, was an occupation carried out in the fresh air. It required a long "walk", of which there were at least three in Southwold. The walker or spinner walked backwards from a wheel operated by a boy, spinning out a rope yarn. When three or four yarns were made, they were laced together to form a rope. The most



famous rope maker in the town was William Button who, on his death in 1935 at the age of ninety, was described as "England's last hand rope maker" using his own garden path as his "walk". Button had previously worked for the two main rope makers in the 1800s.



Southwold's large fishing fleet, as well as visiting ships and merchants, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would have needed a great quantity of salt to preserve their catches. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is documentary evidence of local salt refining at this time. As the demand for salt grew even more with the use of salt for domestic use, a salt works was established in 1660, by royal charter, which provided a boost to the town's economy. The process of salt refining was fairly basic and involved sea water being let into a creek off the River Blyth at high spring tides. It was then left to evaporate and

concentrate, leaving brine. A canvas-sailed wind pump was then used to move the brine to the wooden and brick buildings which housed coal-fired evaporation pans, drying rooms and storage sheds. Imported salt was added to increase the quality, originally from overseas and then from Cheshire.

At the peak of its production, the Southwold salt works stocked more than 1000 tons of crude salt. But it proved a labour-intensive, low-profit business. When a salt tax was imposed by the government in 1702, only the coarsest salt required by the fisheries was in regular demand. Nevertheless, the salt works continued until the early twentieth century.



At its heyday at the beginning of the twentieth century, Southwold boasted many tradesmen who supported the townspeople, tourists, and fishing industry alike. In 1912 these included, among many other professions, six grocers, 122 apartment house owners, three antique dealers, seven bakers, two dressmakers, three surgeons, three ironmongers, three coal merchants, two boat builders and a photographer.

# ADNAMS. SOUTHWOLD

Today, the name of Adnams is almost synonymous with that of Southwold. However, a tradition of brewing in the town stretches back many centuries before the now world-famous brewery emerged. After the great fire of 1659, a number of outsiders settled in Southwold and established several maltings and breweries. When John Kirby visited the town in the 1730s he remarked that:

*"It drives a considerable trade in... old beer; having excellent springs of good water, which may be one reason why their beer is so much esteemed."*

Adnams' Sole Bay Brewery is remarkable in that beer has been brewed on the same site for over 670 years. The first written records of brewing at The Swan date back to 1345. After the great fire, the brewhouse was moved further away from the medieval inn as a fire precaution into The Swan yard, where it has remained ever since. The Adnams brothers, George and Ernest first arrived in Southwold in 1872. George left for South Africa shortly afterwards and was destined not to return (he was eaten by a crocodile) but Ernest remained at the brewery and went into partnership with his brewer, Thomas Sargeant.

Adnams has seen many changes

and had and continues to have great personalities at its helm, which drive it forward. But the company has always taken pride in its history, location and Southwold's long tradition of brewing. Behind the Victorian façade, is one of the most technologically-advanced and energy-efficient breweries in Britain. A major employer in the area from the late 1880s, there is no doubt that Southwold has been shaped by beer, and Adnams by its popular home town. Many of its most popular and famous beers are named after local landmarks or events such as Lighthouse, Gunhill and Broadside (brewed to commemorate the 1672 Battle of Sole Bay).

Much of the modern equipment is hidden inside what seems from the outside to be a row of terraced houses.

Tours of the brewery are available.



## Southwold at war

**Southwold's prominent position at one of the most easterly places on the British mainland has meant that it has been particularly vulnerable in time of war.**

A surviving map dating from 1588, when Elizabethan England was under threat from the Spanish Armada, shows a proposed fortification to the north of the town which was never built because the fleet was defeated. However, less than one hundred years later, the residents of Southwold witnessed a violent sea battle which became known as the Battle of Sole Bay. During the seventeenth century, England fought a series of wars with Holland, comprising many sea battles. In 1672 the English fleet stationed along the east coast had their headquarters in Southwold under the command of the Duke of York (the brother of King Charles II) and the Earl of Sandwich. On the

morning of 28th May the Dutch fleet appeared on the horizon and English ships sailed out to defend the coast. The resulting maritime battle lasted the whole day with heavy losses sustained on both sides. Lord Sandwich's flagship was one of the casualties and its commander was drowned. The people of Southwold helped tend to the injuries of some 800 sailors. The townspeople were also paid one shilling for each dead sailor washed up on the shore that they were willing to recover and bury. In modern times, many items which may relate to the Battle of Sole Bay have been brought up in fishing nets. These include cannon balls, examples of which can be seen in Southwold Museum.



The 1588 illustration of Southwold shows that the existing town defences comprised just a few guns. There were also cannon there at the time of the Battle of Sole Bay. In 1746 these guns were replaced by six iron cannon designed to fire 18-pound cannonballs. They are said to have been given to the town by the Royal Armouries as a protection to shipping against raids. It is these cannon which stand on Gun Hill today. During the Second World War they were removed and buried so as to avoid giving the Germans any excuse to shell or bomb the town. In fact, the town even offered the guns to the government to be melted down to make newer armaments. There was such an outcry, however, that the cannon stayed put. The last time the guns were fired was in 1842 to celebrate the birthday of the then Prince of Wales.

Southwold's position on the coast facing the continent made it a vulnerable target in the First World War. Despite the army units which were stationed there with pillboxes and gun emplacements, the town endured bombing raids by German Zeppelin airships and naval vessels. During the Second World War, Southwold was designated a special evacuation area and the population was reduced mainly to just those civilians who had essential, wartime roles. Like many of the east coast towns, Southwold was under threat of invasion, and was subject to numerous air raids. Seventy-seven buildings were completely destroyed (and many more damaged) and thirteen people lost their lives. Barbed wire and landmines were laid along the beach and the beach huts were scattered around the Common to discourage enemy gliders.



## Southwold at play

*"For the man of busy brain, needing an interval of rest for recuperation of the vital forces expended in wear and tear of modern city life – for the invalid, weary of the many physicians with their costly and conflicting prescriptions, and pining for nature's sweet and unfailing restoratives – for the family, breaking up the routine of home life for the healthful annual holiday season – Southwold, in Suffolk - quaint, quiet and comely in its manifold attractions, has special and peculiar advantages to offer. In its commanding position on the Eastern Coast of England, near the fine bay where the river Blyth discharges itself into the German Ocean – in the purity of its atmosphere, the dryness of the soil, and the surpassing charm of its outlook by sea and surroundings by land, it abundantly possesses beyond many rival and more pretentious resorts those essentials for the "bracing up" of the human system, and restoring to the visitor that degree of bodily health and mental tone of which he stands in need."*



This extract from a guidebook of Southwold dating from the 1890s depicts the town in its tourist heyday. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, many visitors preferred to rent apartments for the duration of their stay. But later on, a number of hotels were built or converted to supplement the older establishments, and these became the most popular accommodation for holidaymakers.

The facilities Southwold offered its visitors were many and varied. Amongst others there was the casino, built in 1800, a small octagonal building which still sits alongside the cannons on Gun Hill. Its purpose was rather different from our modern-day understanding of the word. It was a reading room where tourists, by paying a modest subscription, could relax alongside residents: it was more like a public library today. The salt works were a popular stopping-off point on a visitor's walk around the town. Here they could buy "superior quality" salt to take home. And a useful bi-product of the salt works were the bath rooms where tourists could be invigorated by taking salt-water cold, tepid and hot baths and showers.

The beaches were littered with deck chairs and the ever-popular bathing machines. Bathing machines were essentially four-wheel carriages. Men and women were strictly separated on different parts of the shoreline. The person got into the

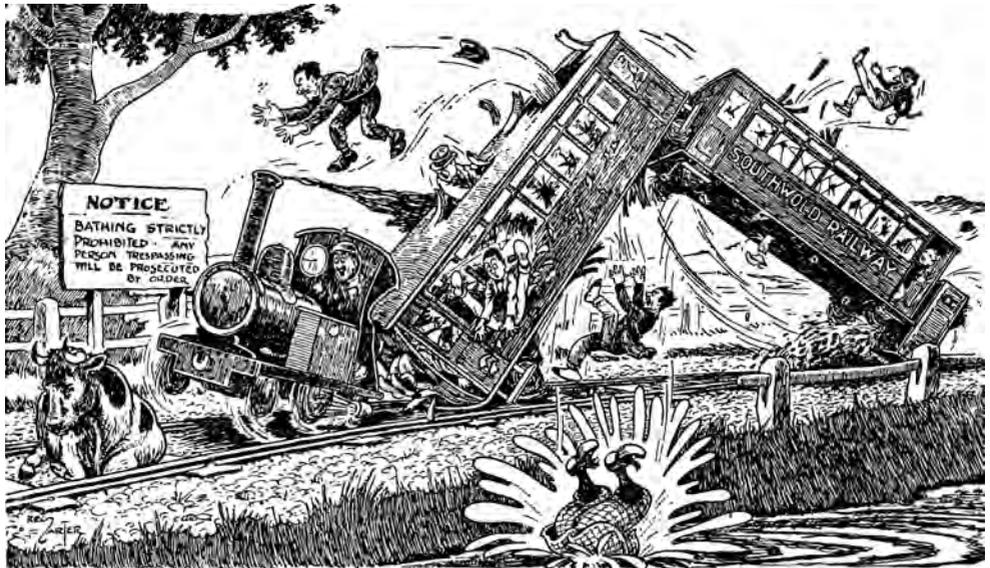
carriage through a door which faced inland. They then changed into their swimwear exited it through a door in the opposite side, down some steps straight into the sea. The town also enjoyed visits in the peak season from circuses, theatre companies, travelling waxworks and similar shows. These all boosted the appeal of Southwold as the resort of choice.

Southwold cleverly developed its tourist attractions and facilities to keep ahead of the competition in the twentieth century. Golf (played on the newly-expanded, eighteen-hole course), tennis and cricket could all be enjoyed on the Common. Before it was bombed in the Second World War, the Constitutional Club offered billiards, dances, badminton and indoor bowls. The pavilion on the pier hosted concert parties and a cinema was opened in 1912. Once mixed gender bathing became socially acceptable, the days of the bathing machine were numbered. At first, tents replaced bathing machines, but these were soon transformed into the iconic beach huts that line the beach walk today.

One of the keys to Southwold's success as a chic tourist resort from the later part of the nineteenth century was its transport links. Southwold businessmen were keen to capitalise on the success of the railway which had reached East Anglia in the mid-nineteenth century. The East Suffolk Railway

provided direct access to Lowestoft from London, and so in 1879 a narrow gauge line was opened which connected Southwold with the main line at Halesworth. With its little blue locomotive and maroon coaches, it became the epitome of the "crab and winkle" branch lines to coastal resorts. Despite the huge popularity of the service, it was beset with minor mishaps

such as cows on the line and the train coming off the rails by exceeding the 16 mph speed limit! These incidents and much more were immortalised in two sets of postcards by local comic illustrator, Reg Carter. Lack of resources and, in particular, competition from road transport bought about the closure of the line in 1929.



**THE SOUTHWOLD EXPRESS** A COW ON THE LINE IS LUCKILY SEEN BY THE GUARD - IN HIS EAGERNESS TO STOP THE TRAIN HE PUTS THE BRAKES ON TOO SUDDENLY !



Coastal shipping had always provided one of the main means of transport for people as well as goods. In 1897 a service of paddle steamers started operating between London and Great Yarmouth, calling at Southwold. The passage from London took eleven hours, provided first and second class accommodation, food and drink. The Belle Steamer Company had a fleet of seven vessels, the largest of which was called the Southwold Belle and the pier was built in 1900 as a landing stage for these steamers. But as road travel increased, the steamship era waned and the last call by the Southwold Belle was in 1928. The pier's landing stage was swept away in a storm a few years later and it endured

a chequered history of part-destruction and rebuilding for the rest of the century.

With its picturesque greens and houses, the wide skies and clear air, it is not surprising that Southwold has been a magnet for artists, photographers and craftsmen over many centuries. In the 1820s, J M W Turner sketched and painted town scenes. Philip Wilson Steer used the Southwold railway to make many painting expeditions to the town and to Walberswick, often accompanied by fellow artists Frederick Brown and Walter Sickert. More recently, Damien Hirst stayed in Southwold while an art student and took lessons from a resident sculptor.

## Southwold today

**Twenty-first century Southwold is often considered a coastal gem of Suffolk and, indeed, of England. At the height of the tourist season it is as busy, if not more so, than it was 100 years ago.**

The town has successfully avoided the pitfalls others have fallen into, such as over-development and expansion of resort facilities. But Southwold's achievements have come (literally) at a price. Second-home ownership is high and therefore residential property is at a premium and even the famous,

brightly-coloured beach huts change hands for the price of a terraced house in other parts of the country. The pier, which was entirely rebuilt and restored in 2001, is enjoying renewed popularity, helped by a collection of tasteful, modern coin-operated novelty machines machines and gift shops.





Despite the comparatively small resident population in the town, community spirit is high. The enthusiasm among local people for the 2014 archaeological excavations demonstrated their strong sense of heritage. It also enabled new social connections and strengthened existing ones. This pride in their shared history is evident in the first-class museums; the Southwold Museum, the Alfred Corry lifeboat

museum, the Adnams museum and the Sailor's Reading Room (originally built as a refuge for mariners but now open to the public to browse the displays of seafaring memorabilia). It is Southwold's long and turbulent history, and the story of how its residents have risen to both the natural and man-made challenges it has faced, that has made the town what it is today.



Southwold Museum open evening

## Touching the Tide

Touching the Tide is a Landscape Partnership Scheme along the Suffolk Coast, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and hosted by Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Scheme, which runs from spring 2013 to early summer 2016, aims to conserve and celebrate the heritage of the Suffolk Coast and increase understanding of coastal change. Full details of all the projects can be found at

[touchingthetide.org.uk](http://touchingthetide.org.uk)

## Southwold Museum

(9 -11 Victoria Street, Southwold, IP18 6HZ)

Southwold Museum is a treasure trove of local history, excitingly displayed for visitors of all ages. The Museum is entirely run by volunteers and receives no financial support from local or central government. Admission is free, but the Museum welcomes donations to keep open. The Museum is open from Easter until the end of October and is fully accessible. See [southwoldmuseum.org](http://southwoldmuseum.org) for opening times.

## Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance and support of members of the Southwold Museum which is owned and managed by the Southwold Museum & Historical Society, especially the curator, Jan Holloway. In particular, my thanks go to Simon Loftus, author of the museum's publication "An Illustrated History of Southwold", who provided digital images of many of the old photographs and illustrations in this booklet.

Thank you also to Sarah Groves whose modern photographs are used throughout. She also provided text for the Adnams section.

The front cover aerial photograph is by Mike Page and the modern shot of the pier was taken by Tony Scheuregger. The back cover illustration is taken from "Soulede – its fortress", a watercolour and ink illustration on vellum dated 1588, held at The National Archives in Kew.

This publication takes as its starting point, and quotes, the report by Carena Lewis and Catherine Ranson of Access Cambridge Archaeology, University of Cambridge entitled "The results of the Archaeological Test Pit Excavations in Southwold and Reydon, Suffolk, 2014" (available to download from [touchingthetide.org.uk](http://touchingthetide.org.uk)). Copies can be found at Southwold Museum and also as a downloadable pdf on the Southwold Museum and Access Cambridge Archaeology websites.

Contact details for the author of this booklet can be found at [www.ancestral-heritage.co.uk](http://www.ancestral-heritage.co.uk).





Origins of

190