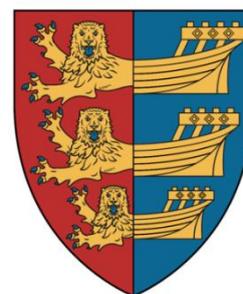


Tenterden – a Cinque Port

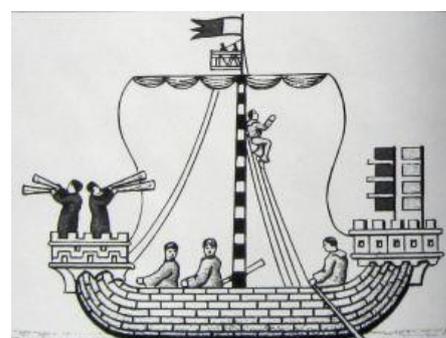
Nearly 600 years ago, King Henry VI presented the prosperous town of Tenterden with a fabulous and exclusive invitation. A Royal Charter from the King permitted Tenterden to join a unique military alliance known as “The Cinque Ports”. The five (cinque) original ports were Sandwich, Dover, Hythe, New Romney and Hastings, alongside two ancient towns, Winchelsea and Rye. Since early medieval times these places had worked together, providing a fleet of ships for the Crown and protecting the south coast of England. The ships were also used for a lucrative cross-channel trade. To be a member of this select Cinque Ports organisation brought immense privileges, status, freedom and wealth. In return, the members together had to fulfil all the duties needed to maintain a fighting, merchant navy.



Heraldic emblem of the Cinque Ports



KEY: ● Five Ports ● Two Ancient Towns ■ Seven Surviving Limbs

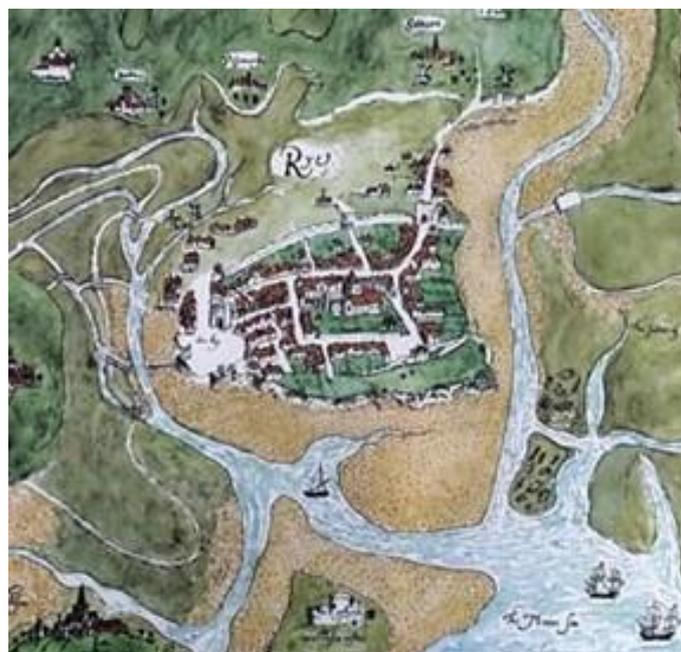


13th Century Cinque Ports Ship

In the year 1449



Prior to the Royal invitation of 1449, Tenterden was already a prosperous town, with wealth in wool, and having a tidal, sheltered, ‘little port’ i.e., Smallhythe. Court records show that in 1364 a London merchant had £74 of goods (worth £40,000 today) stolen from Smallhythe. It was a busy shipbuilding centre, surrounded by plentiful timber and iron supplies. By the 14th century some grand ships built at Tenterden were helping the people of Rye to fulfil their duties for the Cinque Ports. Unfortunately, Rye suffered a series of catastrophic events: the Black Death, raids by marauding French forces, the changing course of the River Rother and the harbour becoming clogged with silt. From Rye’s tragedies grew the good fortunes of Tenterden. In 1449 by means of the Cinque Ports Charter, Tenterden was legally separated from Kent and formally incorporated with Rye. To maintain the town’s freedom, independent governors were appointed, i.e. a Bailiff, Jurats and



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Community. The first Bailiff (Mayor) was Thomas, a local member of the substantial Petlesden family; Jurats were councillors with legal powers in the town Court; the Community included the privileged classes of merchants and freemen only. Their official "Seal" showed a masted ship bearing the arms of the Cinque Ports and the Petlesdens; St Mildred, to whom our church is still dedicated, is pictured on the reverse. Thus Tenterden, so well situated beside the English Channel, had secured a free market for local goods and immense privileges for the community.

The Benefits

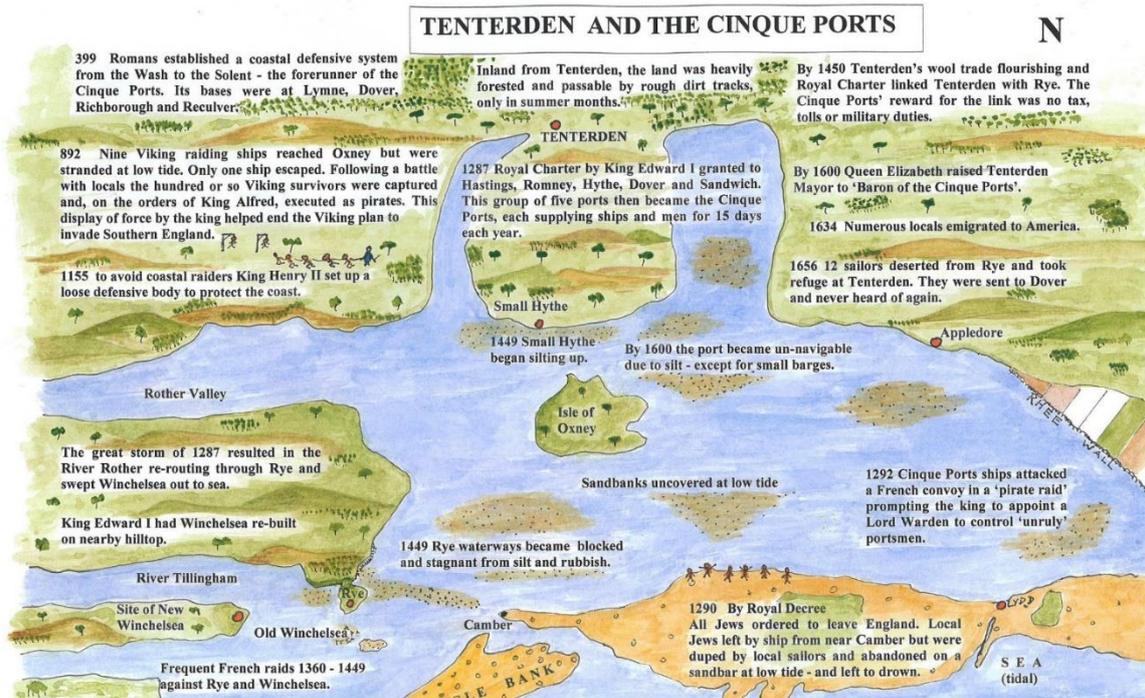
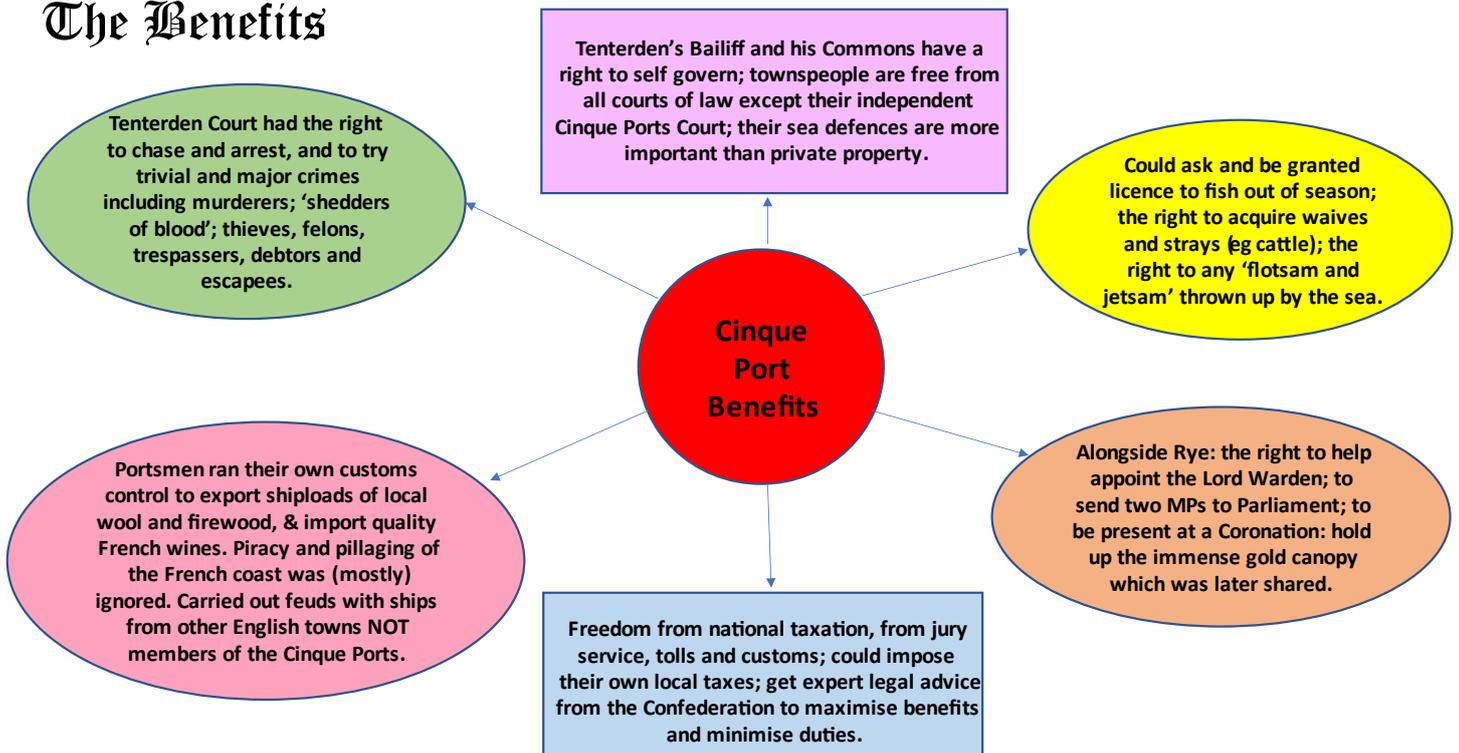
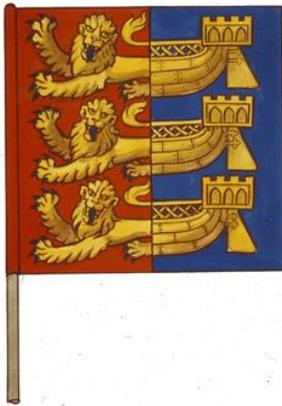


Image courtesy of Dr Adrian Greaves

To look at the magnificent tower of St Mildred's Church is to see tangible expression of the wealth generated after 1449. The Bailiff at the town court also made good use of his legal right to keep order. Punishments were inflicted, included giving fines; putting the offender in a cart or pillory; and for serious crimes (which then included theft) there could be a sentence of death by hanging. Executions took place on the highest point outside town at Gallows Green; these provided such popular entertainment that in 1706, not only did the gallows have to be replaced again, but a new, larger viewing stand had to be built. A tall oak nearby provided a fine display of previous corpses; this local place is still known as Gibbet Oak. The last execution in Tenterden took place in 1785 when two local burglars were hung in the presence of the Mayor and the Jurats (councillors) - almost all the population of the town turned out to watch.



The Burdens



In 1041 Edward the Confessor had set out his requirement to the south coast Portsmen, which was to use 20 of their ships, each with a crew of 21, for 15 days of service annually. When William the Conqueror eventually got a loyal reception from the Portsmen, his Charter (written to them in old French), coined the term "Cinque Ports"; his requirement was 57 ships for 15 days annually. The 1155 Charter from Henry III had the same obligations but expanded on their benefits. A more specific Charter of 1229 numbered the ships to be separately provided by each of the Confederation's Ports and that of 1278 set out a magnificently designed Flag: the three fighting English lion-ships. Rye was obligated for five ships in 1392 and provided these with help from Tenterden shipwrights. If the Crown used the ships and the crews for longer periods – then the costs and wages became at the Crown's expense instead.

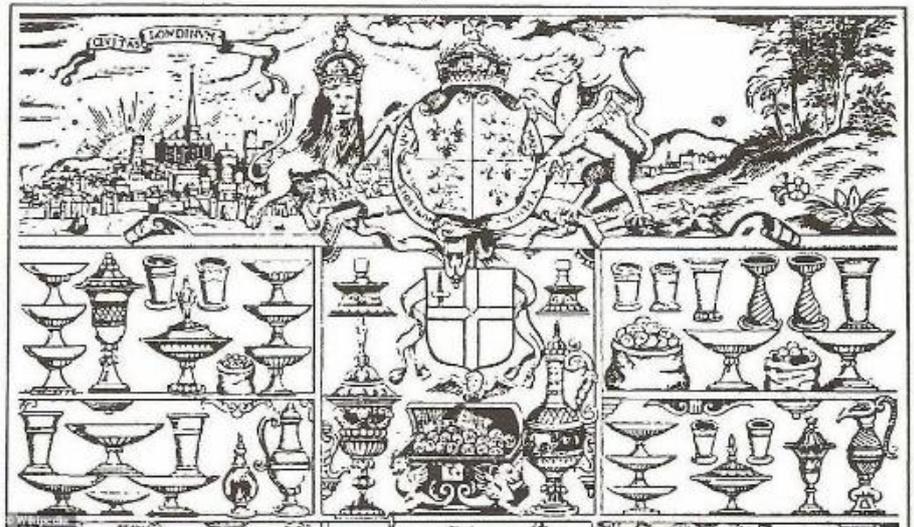
In addition to providing ships and crews for sea battles at home and abroad, Portsmen fought in the king's armies and there were other obligations. The Confederation continually guarded the southern coast which included defending English fishing rights, and monarchs had to be ferried back and forth across the Channel on an interesting variety of missions. Further costs were incurred for maintaining the stately buildings and trappings of the Confederation itself. Valued workers could be paid pensions. Tenterden was always ready to dispute its annual share of Rye's costs; in 1492 this was set at 6 marks (£4) annually. A few years later it was agreed that for each 'half a mark' (ten shillings/50p), Tenterden should pay one-third to Rye's two-thirds. There were ways to redress these costs; the town's officials made the most of their 'expense accounts' payable by Rye: typically ferry fares, fish meals, with ale and wine from the local inn. Claimants included one Thomas Caxton, brother to the renowned printer William Caxton – reputedly born in Tenterden.



Image courtesy of Dr Adrian Greaves

In 1529 at the Cinque Ports Court, Tenterden requested help with the work of “*inhibityng of Frenchemen to fische on this coste*”, notwithstanding that was in their own fishing interests too. Early in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, the town provided 24 men and 4 horses to help her defeat a rebellion in the North. Ten years later, the thrifty Queen staged the very first national lottery ever, with the much needed purpose of upgrading coastal defences; Tenterden Bailiff and landowner Edward Hales was one of several local people who raised a total £4 7s towards tickets. Hales’ reason for buying a ticket was a guilty conscience about the splendid tower of St Mildred’s church: it was believed this had been built with money purloined from the Goodwin Sands sea barriers, which had then failed and caused much loss of life.

¶ A very rich Lotterie general without any Blankes



A century later Tenterden was still disputing with Rye on the matter of sharing contributions. Smallhythe was in its turn a failing port; in the 1760s the town was sued by Rye for debt default - unsuccessfully. By this time however the glory of the Cinque Ports Confederation overall was sadly diminished.

SHIP BUILDING AT SMALL HYTHE - Tenterden’s Port. 14th and 15th Centuries

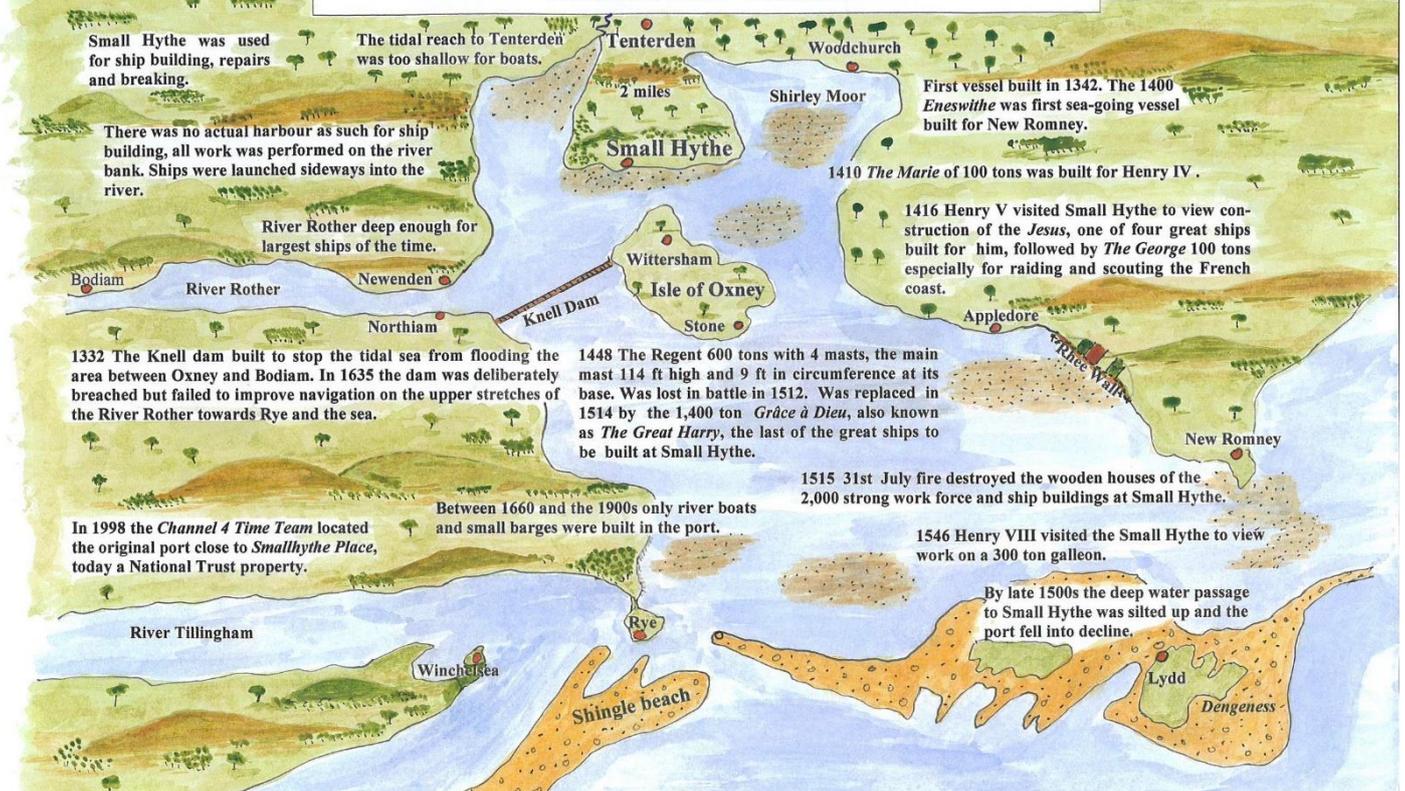


Image courtesy of Dr Adrian Greaves

Which ships were built near Tenterden?

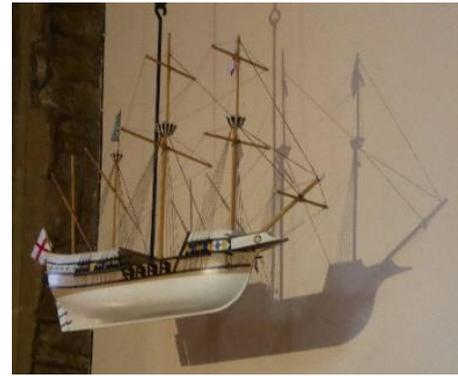


From 1300 – 1550 up to two hundred people lived at Smallhythe, with more temporary workers in the busy times. Repairs in the yard, and the breaking up of old ships were an important part of the work, as well as building small vessels for local merchants and fishing families. Another useful small port was situated at Reading Street. A ferry was needed to get across to Wittersham on the Isle of Oxney.

1545 The Grand Mistress, 450 tons, built for Henry VIII

Year	Ship	Size	Comment
1340s	<i>unknown</i>	Barges (for goods)	Coastal vessels are built – on the tidal bank itself: no harbour as such. Valuable cargoes including wine are unloaded.
1342	<i>unknown</i>	Four ships	The fleet sailing Edward III to Brittany includes Smallhythe ships.
1360s	<i>La Gabriel</i>	Cargo ships	The 'home' ports of Smallhythe and Reading Street.
1378	<i>Le Seint Marie</i>	A Cray 'bot'	Local, small vessel.
1390	<i>Alice of Smalide</i>		The master of this ship was "William Newenden".
1394	<i>Marie</i>	100 tons	Indicates scale of shipbuilding at the port.
1400	<i>Eneswithe</i>	A barge	Cost £40 6s 8d (£33,000 today) built for New Romney Cinque Port.
1401	<i>unknown</i>	Round ship	Built for Rye as Cinque Port ship.
1410	<i>Marie</i>	100 tons	King Henry IV ordered this ship.
1415/16	<i>Jesus</i>	1,000 tons	The first ship in the world to be built at this huge size; commissioned by Henry V who came in person to see the process.
1415/16	<i>George</i>	120 tons	A 'ballinger', a two-masted ship, could also be rowed to scout and raid the enemy.
1420	<i>St Gabriel</i>	40 tons	This ballinger was in port for rebuilding and repair.
1486	<i>Regent</i>	600 tons	Four-masted; fighting alongside the <i>Mary Rose</i> in a battle with France in 1512, this ship was burnt out.
1497	<i>Mary Fortune</i>	A bark	Very little is known about this ship.
Built in London 1514	<i>Great Harry (Henry Grace a Dieu)</i>	1400 tons, to replace the <i>Regent</i>	'Great Galleon' too big for Smallhythe! 37 shipwrights walked from Tenterden to Woolwich to help build this largest ship in the world carrying 1000 sailors. Commissioned by a young Henry VIII.
1515	<i>A Lesser Galleon</i>	200 tons	Both ships intended to augment the King's fighting fleet.
1538	<i>Great Galley</i>	300 tons	Henry VIII visited Tenterden to view the building of this 'Great Barke'. Stayed at Heronden, entertained by choir and pageant.
1530s 1540s	Ship maintenance and repairs taking place		At various times the King sent in his most important fighting ships for this essential work.
1545	<i>Grand Mistress</i>	450 tons	A 'galleasse', the most swift and supreme ship of the time with 28 cannons, and carrying 250 sailors, gunners and soldiers.
1636	The build up of silt means big ships can no longer navigate to the port.		
Late 1600s	Ship building mostly confined to river boats and small sea-going vessels.		

The Cinque Ports fleet had aimed at undisputed sovereignty in the English Channel. Overall they fulfilled the Kingdom's defences but only when aided by other maritime communities. Historians debate its relative importance and long-term significance. Certainly the monopoly was lost by the 14th Century and by the time of the Spanish Armada (1588) the Royal dockyards at Greenwich and Chatham were functionally much more important. In 1600 Queen Elizabeth I acknowledged the change to Tenterden by issuing a new charter of Corporation. With this, the Bailiff was transformed to a Mayor and "Baron of the Cinque Ports": the first being John Hales. He was supported by a council of Justices; local wealth remained secure as this market town had abundant harvests of hops and fruit, and rich grazing was available on the Marshes. By Queen Victoria's reign the last remaining strange rights of the Cinque Ports Confederation had been abolished.



St Mildred's Church has a model of the 'Grand Mistress'

The Cinque Ports importance today: historical, ceremonial, and environmental.

Today the Cinque Ports maintain their historical and ceremonial significance. Their sobriquet "Cradle of the English Navy" is justified with pride in our nation's maritime achievements. In acknowledgement of this the Royal Navy has affiliated HMS Kent to the Cinque Ports organisation: she is a missile-carrying frigate deployed in submarine tracking and in the war against piracy.



HMS Kent, 2021



Coronation of King James II 1685 accompanied by 16 Barons of the Cinque Ports

The Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports remains the "Keeper of the Coast" and notable holders of the post have included the Duke of Wellington, Sir Winston Churchill and Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother. The medieval right to carry a Coronation Canopy over the newly-crowned Monarch's head continues to this day, and is awarded to a "Baron of the Cinque Ports".

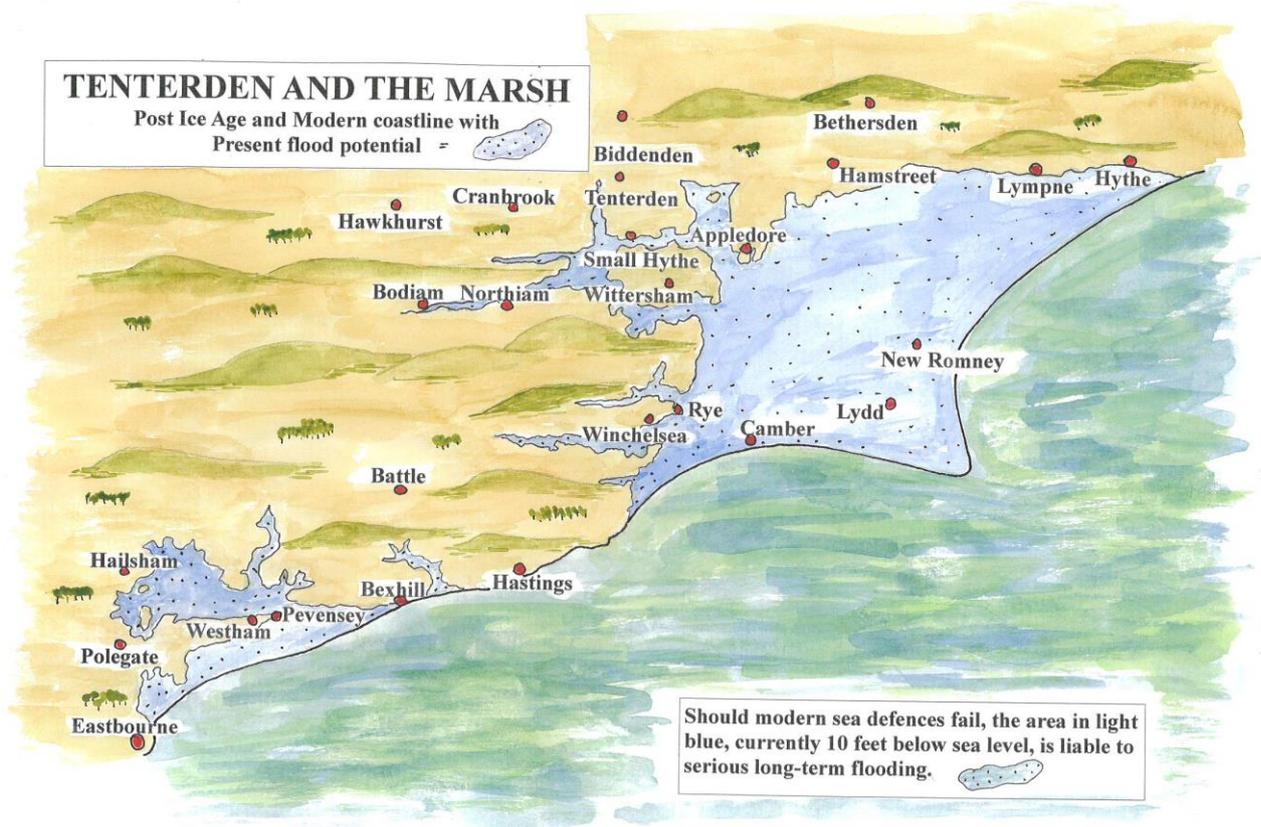


Image courtesy of Dr Adrian Greaves

History of course can identify many causes which explain the decline of a once-vital organisation. However there are powerful geological and climate features which have confounded our array of Cinque Ports, and these do not remain in the past: there are increasingly serious implications arising from our lifestyles today. The Cinque Ports coastal area is highly vulnerable to rising sea levels. We see unprecedented increases in temperatures, upsurges in winter rain and more frequent storms. There would be a severe impact on the Tenterden district if sea defences failed and Romney Marsh was inundated by the sea. Our usual highest tides in spring could easily encompass some seven miles around the town's boundary: to Rolvenden Station; bringing the sea back to Smallhythe; and past Reading Street to reach the Woodchurch Road.

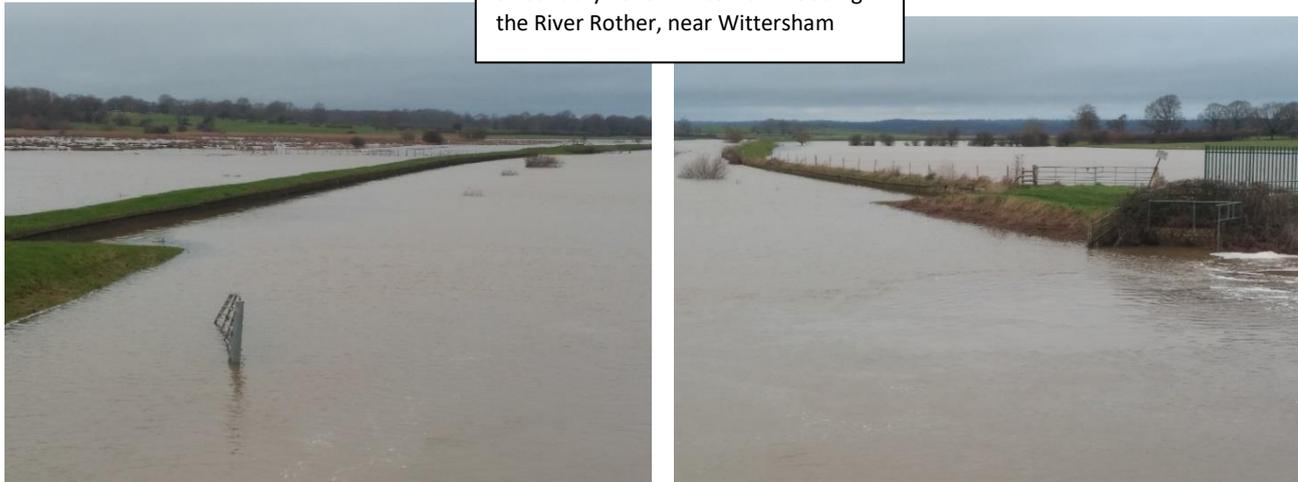
Environmental Emergency

In their 2019 meeting at Winchelsea, the Cinque Ports Standing Committee set out the following resolution, proposed by Hythe, concerning the emergency of climate change and that effective action cannot be undertaken by individuals alone:

"The Confederation recognises that we are facing a climate and ecological emergency and encourages all members to commit resources and align policies to address this setting a target date of carbon neutrality from their activities and monitoring progress annually."

Tenterden Town Council has taken several progressive steps, addressing climate change: (i) initiating an ongoing Neighbourhood Plan with a great emphasis on the environment; (ii) In 2020 launching a Climate Action Plan, to lead by example and aiming for the town council to be carbon neutral by 2030 (iii) September 2022, declaring a Climate Emergency.

5th January 2023: winter rain flooding the River Rother, near Wittersham



Environmental catastrophes from the history of the Cinque Ports

(NB List is not exhaustive)

Place & Era	Scale of change	Environmental/seismic Event
The prehistoric coastline - 1066	Coastal bays, creeks, islands, marshes and vegetation come and go, as the sea seems to advance and retreat.	Isostatic land uplift and fall, with earthquake and tempest.
Old Romney and Old Winchelsea 1230s - 1250s	Romney's Cinque Port harbour landlocked becoming two miles inland. (Old) Winchelsea is obliterated; loss of life.	Earthquakes, mid 13 th Century. Dramatic high tides churned up sand, silt, mud and debris.
Appledore 13 th Century	A famed estuary port is no longer navigable.	Storms and River Rother changing course.
New Romney 1100s – 1300s	Cinque Port harbour replacing Old Romney but also buried to become one mile inland.	Southern England flood of 1287 Seismic activity.
Old Winchelsea 1280-87	Old coastal port turned into an island. A new port was built.	More storms and changing course of the River Rother; colossal storm 1287.
Tenterden's ports 1332	Knelle Dam built from Northiam, to Wittersham on the Isle of Oxney, enabled shipbuilding at Smallhythe and Reading Street.	River was diverted around the Isle of Oxney.
Rye 1350 - 1375	The town's eastern side was destabilised and undercut.	Encroachment of the river.
(New) Winchelsea 1400	Harbour almost completely locked in.	Deposits of sea gravel and silt.
Northeye 1229 - 1400	From Cinque Port companion of Hastings: decline throughout the 14 th Century.	Gradually drowned and swept away by the sea.
Reculver 1 st to 15 th Century	Roman and Saxon shore fort and thriving town, a companion of Cinque Port Sandwich; to be an abandoned village.	Silting up and coastal erosion.
Hythe 15 th Century	Harbour in slow decline despite dredging.	East-setting current
Dover 15 th Century	New sea wall needed; massive cliff fall; the build up of shingle.	Strong channel currents: the Eastward Drift.
Tenterden 1500s	Waning tidal flow hindering launch of ships, with narrowing of the channel.	Incoming ships constantly unload their sand ballast, adding to channel debris.
Hastings 1562	Efforts to preserve the harbour are begun.	

Sandwich 1574	Decay is recorded in a formal report, when incoming tide can no longer scour the port..	Human activity to drain inland, with silting diversion of the River Stour.
Pevensey 1260 – 1600s	This once vital 'limb' of Hastings slowly landlocks; both trade and smuggling remove to the bay.	River silt and sea drift.
Tenterden 1635 - 1680	Farming interest, to reclaim land, won out over the decline of seagoing benefits. Navigation to local wharves almost completely restricted.	Deliberate breach of the Knelle Dam to divert the River Rother with construction of a new river channel at Oxney, for drainage.
Rye 1823	Rye's new harbour becomes a mile inland, its cliffs oddly above dry land.	Land levels change as a result of seismic activity.
Dover 16 th Century to 19 th Century	Ongoing constant engineering works to delay blocking of the harbour.	Erosion of the cliffs and accompanying build up of sand and shingle banks.
Tenterden 1903	One last small boat managed to reach the port.	The Romney Marshes continue to dry out.
Across the Cinque Ports coastline, many coastal defence and flood protection measures are in place including monitoring the relative sea level and eustatic sea level. Present day land-sinking across Romney Marsh (already 10 ft below sea level), is continuing at a rate of 1 ft per century. Today the marsh is protected only by the sea wall and computer activated pumps.		

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