

# FACTSHEET

## Ports

Ports have, throughout history, been a place where goods and people arrive or leave the country by sea. The UK port industry, by virtue of our long coastline and maritime history, is the largest in Europe, handling over 500 million tonnes of freight in 2010.

The British coastline is long, indeed very long. It measures approximately 11,000 miles and if the larger islands are added the coastline rises to more than 19,000 miles. That is the same as from Liverpool to Australia and back! This vast coastline of ours has hundreds of ports, from the busiest and the biggest like the Port of Felixstowe, Grimsby or Teesport to your smaller ones like Porlock Weir in Somerset or Seacliff harbour in Scotland.

### **Do you know the difference between a harbour and a port?**

Did you know that, historically ships were simply drawn up on beaches. However, over the centuries the relative importance of each port and harbour has changed due to changes in trade and environmental factors such as rivers that carry large amounts of sediments making the riverbeds and harbours shallower. As ships became bigger, deep water access has been a major factor in determining a port's success.

In the 18th century there were major harbour improvements with dredging of channels and construction of piers. Wet docks were built at London, Liverpool, Hull and Bristol. London was still the largest port in the 19th century when new docks were built. Cardiff became a major coal exporting port after a railway link was built, as did other South Wales ports. The railways were responsible for developing new ports such as Newhaven as ferry terminals whilst the Manchester Ship Canal enabled Manchester to become a significant port though far inland.

When oil replaced coal after the First World War, coal ports like Cardiff declined. London, Southampton, Manchester, Liverpool, and Glasgow increased in trade during the inter-war years, and ferry ports such as Harwich and Dover grew. Oil terminals were built from the 1920s and the larger ships required new docks at existing ports.

After the Second World War new cargo handling methods were introduced, such as pallets (1950), containerisation (1960s) and roll-on/roll-off ships.

Dockers at some ports resisted this change, so leading to the development of new facilities at ports such as Felixstowe and Tilbury. Older port facilities became redundant and were redeveloped, such as Canary Wharf in London. In 1977 the major ports of Britain were London, Tees and Hartlepool, Grimsby and Immingham, Forth, and Milford Haven. Many of the small ports were redeveloped as marinas.

### **Harbours versus Ports**

- While a harbour and a port may look like similar structures along a coastline, they serve different purposes
- A harbour is either natural or manmade
- Ports are mostly manmade and are bigger and have many facilities
- Harbours provide safe anchorage to ships in conditions of bad weather
- Ports are mainly used for loading and unloading of ships.



**The High Tide Foundation is a registered charity, created and driven by port-related businesses to provide opportunities for the young people of Teesside**

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