

Weymouth



General History:

Two boroughs, one each side of the river Wey (which is the shortest major river in the U.K at 5+ miles) Melcombe Regis & Weymouth, combined in 1252 as the seaport Weymouth trading in wine & later wool.

During the 1530s Henry VIII had two forts built at the harbour entrance to protect the Dorset coast from invasion. The two settlements each side of the river were in constant argument about the use of the harbour, so Elizabeth became tired of this and in 1571 she formalized the earlier (1252) merger with an Act of Parliament.

Over the Civil War years, control of the town changed a number of times & suffered much damage. It went from Parliament to Royalist & by 1644 back into the hands of Parliament.

During the French Revolution Weymouth began to gain military importance. In 1795 the “Red Barracks” were built at Fort Nothe but were burned down in 1798. They were replaced with larger premises at Radipole.

Building projects continued into Victorian times with Portland Harbour being completed in 1857.

WWI saw 120,000 injured ANZAC army personnel convalescing in Weymouth because of the availability of army camps & the mild climate.

During WWII the town was a target for German bombs. There were many air raids which left the town very scarred. In 1943 the Bouncing Bomb (designed by Barnes Wallis of “Dam Busters” fame) was tested in the lagoon behind Chesil Beach. Tens of thousands of troops (mostly U.S.) departed from Weymouth on D-Day for Normandy

Tourism:

Tourism really began in the late 1700s when George III stayed at the grand mansion his brother, the Duke of Gloucester, had built on the seafront. He stayed 14 times, even bathing in the sea, to help cure his madness. In 1808 a white horse effigy of the king was carved into the hillside at Osmington (facing the wrong way, away from Weymouth!) & in 1810 a statue of the king was put up on the Esplanade. Georgian-style properties followed.