

Bembridge and St Helens Harbour Association



APPRAISAL OF THE ENVIRONMENT OF BEMBRIDGE HARBOUR

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PART 2 HISTORY

This version DOES NOT contain maps, illustrations and some tables from the 1995 edition.

Please be aware that the report describes the situation in 1994/5, and has not yet been updated. This pdf publication is intended to form the basis of a re-appraisal project.

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2 HISTORY

2.1 SUMMARY AND AIMS

2.1.1 SUMMARY

This section provides a selective summary of history of the Harbour, concentrating on reclamation and the construction of road, rail and port facilities after 1874, and the development of commercial and leisure usage. It is compiled principally from secondary and tertiary sources, with a major contribution from Hollis' 1964 study. Much additional information contributed from a range of personal sources and interviews has had to be excluded from this section, but these important contributions to local history may be made available later. Appendix A lists relevant Acts of Parliament.

2.1.2 AIMS

To provide a background to the remainder of the report by:

1. briefly recording early reclamations and the final building of the embankment
2. outlining social and commercial development of the harbour area

2.2 RECLAMATION AND ENCLOSURE

Bembridge Harbour was until the last century merely the seaward portion of Brading Haven. Brading Haven was at one time the most important harbour on the Island, and Brading was the Island's major port, but even before reclamation it was much reduced from its prominence in the 16th and 17th centuries. The extensive Brading Haven of early times has changed its shape and been much reduced in area by both human action and natural forces.

Hollis (1964) notes that 'there is a tradition that at one time there were pastures where the sea and mud later held sway -- a story supported by the discovery in 1620 of a well, encased with stones, near the centre of the haven'. At the same time, it is said that the sea at one time covered all the low-lying land from Sandown (then Sandham) to Brading, Bembridge being shown on very old maps as a island, although this may have been tidal marshland.

2.2.1 EARLY INNINGS (Map 2:1)

The first recorded reclamation was in 1338 when Sir William Russell, Warden of the Isle of Wight and Lord of Yaverland, drained some of the Sandham Marsh and built the Yar bridge.

The second reclamation was made by George Oglander and Germain Rychards in 1562, when the North Marsh and Mill Marsh were reclaimed by building the embankment still to be seen near to the old railway embankment at Brading, starting close to the former cement works and extending towards St Helens.

Map 2:1 Brading Haven: Early Innings

Sketch map indicating the extent of Brading Haven and the reclamation attempts referred to in the text. Present harbour, river, roads and landmarks are shown for reference.

The third reclamation was in 1594 by Edward Rychards, when land extending from the Great or Middle Sluices (still extant and used to conserve the Yar's water for farm land to the west) up to Yarbridge was reclaimed as feeding grounds for cattle. Prior to this inning (reclamation) small commercial vessels could sail up to and anchor near the High Street, Brading.

The main attempt to enclose the whole of the Brading Haven came in 1620 when Sir Hugh Myddleton, builder of London's New River, was engaged by Sir Bevis Thelwell to build an embankment across the Harbour. Work commenced on 10 December 1620 and took 2 years to complete. First a row of oak piles was driven in a line from points equivalent to the Lodge at Bembridge to Woodnutts Stores at St Helens Duver. Sluices were constructed to let out the river water and the whole made watertight by clay, earth and stones. Plans were made to plant the reclaimed land with corn, cabbages and rape, but since the land was too sandy, only rape grew successfully. (Worsley 1781). The Embankment lasted for 8 years until the sea breached it on 8 March 1630.

2.2.2 THE EMBANKMENT

In 1874 Jabez Spencer Balfour, the head of The Liberator group of companies, promoted the *Brading Harbour Improvement Railway and Works Act*. The Act empowered a Liberator company, the Brading Harbour Improvement and Railway Company (BHI&RC), to construct an embankment across the harbour, and a railway from Bembridge to Brading to join with the Isle of Wight Railways and Brading Quay spur.

In 1877 work commenced on this last inning sited further up the Harbour and above the Embankment of 1620. The sluices on the new embankment were sited so as to clear the Tidal Mill and leave it open to the sea. The materials for the construction came from Bembridge Down and Portsdown Hill.

The closing of the final 70-foot gap at the Bembridge end (Map 2:2) was extremely difficult. After three failed attempts, BHI&RC's engineer CH Saunders consulted R F Grantham, who recommended the construction of a timber dam using a double width of timber piles, timber walling, sheet piling and sandbags (Grantham 1900). This was finished on 26 June 1879 and held until 18 October when an unusually high tide overflowed the narrow embankment and undermined the dam, carrying it entirely away and making the gap bigger and deeper than before. Two more attempts to fill the gap failed, but finally, on 23 February 1880, the dam was restored and the tide shut out.

The embankment was later widened to 35 feet and a roadway and footpath were made along its top. When the quay and gas works at St. Helens were built many thousands of tons of sand, shingle and rocks dredged from the channel were deposited over the new sea wall. The Yar was straightened and canalised and sluice gates constructed to exclude the sea water from the reclaimed land.

By the 1890s it became obvious that St Helens, although it did a good trade, could not draw sufficient trade from Newport. The cost had been huge -- £420,000 (equal to about £20 million today). The directors of the Liberator Group, in an attempt to hide the financial state of the company from its shareholders resorted to creative accounting, and in 1892 the Group failed and Jabez Balfour was sentenced to a long term of penal servitude in Parkhurst Prison. The BHI&RC changed its name to the Brading Harbour and Railway company under the terms of the Isle of Wight (Brading Harbour Railway) Act of 1898 which also authorised the Isle of Wight Railway (IWR) to take over the company. It was sold for £16,500 on 31st July, 1898 (Doe 1994).

Map 2:2 Brading Haven: Successful Reclamation

Map to show the final enclosure and the location of the breaches (from Grantham 1900)

2.2.3 HARBOUR ENTRANCES AND CHANNELS

Hollis (1964) points out that in Speed's map (1611) and in an old print of the Yar Island, the entrance to Brading Haven was close to the Old Church at St Helens. The 1775 edition shows a complete reversal of the Duver Spit. 'The existence of the channel here indicates that the Duver was originally attached to Bembridge in the form of a peninsula'. There was further evidence in leases which permitted Bembridge tenants to send cattle to graze the Duver, and in its status as part of Brading parish. this former course of the Yar can still be traced below St Helens Common.

At some time before Myddleton's attempted reclamation in 1620, according to Hollis, a new channel was cut through the Bembridge side of Duver, presumably by the action of the sea in bad weather.

In this century, the seaward channel has moved. The earlier channel ran roughly parallel with the coast from Nodes Point past the old Church to the present harbour entrance, but in 1936 a natural break in Bembridge Spit occurred

and was artificially enlarged to form the present Pilot Channel. Subsequent sea action has caused the westward movement of this channel (see Geography section).

2.2.4 SILTING

One of the major problems with the Harbour is that it continues to be an estuary of the Yar. After the enclosure, the embankment was enlarged with sand and dredgings from the Harbour but serious silting soon became a problem. At first, attempts were made to maintain the channel by scouring; i.e. opening the sluices at low water and allowing a flood of Yar water to rush down the channel. When this proved unsuccessful, a grab dredger was installed. The tasks of this dredger were many and kept it in almost continuous operation. It had to maintain the channel especially near the sluices, and in the outer Harbour it dredged shingle to be used as ballast on the Isle of Wight railways. It had to dredge a second, more southerly channel for shipping to the quays and maintain the Harbour around the moorings of the Bembridge Sailing Club and the passenger ferry pier.

Although dredging was maintained during the inter-war years, by the grab dredger Ballaster which continued to clear the channels of silt and to obtain shingle for ballast for the railways, during the second war dredging in the harbour was neglected resulting in increased silting.

It is not known whether or how large structures (Sandham Castle in the early 16th Century, and St Helens Fort in the 19th Century) affected coastal formation. Similarly, the effect of St Helens Mill on the harbour itself is uncertain.

'Built in, or about, the year 1780, the Mill became a thriving concern and obtained its power from a head of water which was fed by the incoming tides. The water was conserved within an area enclosed by masonry dams. An ingenious system of sluices regulated the outflow so that surplus water caused a valuable scour into the harbour and was augmented by the gush of water flowing out from the mill-race itself' (Hollis 1964).

The mill was acquired after the first war by the St Helens and Isle of Wight Coal and Wharf Co., succeeding Edward Way and Sons who had owned it for most of the 19th century. By 1930 the mill was no longer working. After the second World War it was in ruins and in 1969 the remains were converted into a home (Major 1970).

The importance of the mill ponds to wildlife is noted elsewhere, but Hollis points out that the ponds themselves are silting up.

2.3 COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND DECLINE

The intention of Jabez Balfour and the Liberator Group was clearly to create a modern commercial port close to the mainland and linked by rail to the interior of the Island.

Brading had apparently declined from its earlier importance, although maintaining some trade with the mainland, including the export of cement. The upper reaches of Brading Haven were shallow and navigation was difficult except in the vicinity of St Helens where ships were able to discharge and load cargoes at the Flour Mill. St Helens Roads had for many centuries been used by the Navy, and there were already small ferries operating between Portsmouth, Gosport and St Helens, regulated by the Admiralty (White 1964).

The importance of Bembridge and St Helens was largely in victualling and the provision of water which reputedly remained drinkable on long voyages. Until recent times the Harbour was the base for pilots responsible for guiding shipping into Portsmouth and Southampton.

Woodward (1991) provides many photographs of the Bembridge side of the harbour from the period just after reclamation to the 1920s, including the old harbour wall at the Point which is now covered by sand.

2.3.1 THE RAILWAY

Between 1864 and 1866 the Isle of Wight (Eastern Section) Railway, later the Isle of Wight Railway, opened a 11.25 mile railway from Ryde St John's Road to Ventnor with intermediate stations at Brading, Sandown, Shanklin and Wroxall plus a spur or siding from Brading station to Brading Quay, the main port in the area. This siding later became part of the Bembridge branch line. There were many early plans to construct a railway from Brading to Bembridge because of concern that the Eastern end of the Island would be left behind by rival places on the Island. It was left to BHI&RC to actually build the line to Bembridge via St Helens. In 1877 stations were built in anticipation of the completion of the line (Doe 1994).

In 1878 the railway from Brading to St Helens was opened for goods traffic. There was a substantial yard and

sidings at St Helens North and South Quays, as well as a later narrow-gauge railway connecting the gasworks with the quayside.

The line from St Helens to Bembridge, which crossed the Yar on its own steel bridge, opened on 27 May 1882. The station, coal siding and turning area were in the area now occupied by the Harbour Strand development. There was significant freight and coal trade to Bembridge as the village grew (Harding 1988).

The new railway made a considerable difference to the lives of people living in St Helens and Bembridge, increasing the tourist potential of Bembridge and the commercial potential of St Helens.

From 1st January, 1923 the Bembridge branch line was operated by Southern Railway. During the late 1920s and 1930s Southern Railway made improvements to the branch. St Helens Quay was rebuilt as was the bridge at St Helens carrying the road and railway over the Yar. New engines and carriages were introduced and the branch was re-railed and upgraded. In 1948 the railways were nationalised. In the early 1950s road transport was becoming more widespread, both for freight and passengers. On Monday, 21 September 1953 the Bembridge branch line closed (Doe 1994).

2.3.2 EMBANKMENT TOLL ROAD

From 1882 tolls were charged for the use of the present Embankment Road, first by the railway companies and later British Railways. The tollgate was situated across the road from Bembridge Station, and tolls were collected from persons, vehicles and animals using the road.

In 1947, as a result of a Ministry of Transport circular offering grants, the Isle of Wight County Council (IWCC) initiated enquiries with Southern Railway regarding the possible purchase of the toll road and embankment in order to free it from Toll and with the intention of having it classified as a Class 2 road. Negotiations were protracted, with delays caused by rail nationalisation and subsequently the closure of the Branch Line.

Some of the difficulties encountered later were concerned with the methods and costs of discharging the Railway's obligations to the River Board to defend the embankment against the sea and permanently to ensure an adequate discharge of fresh water from behind the embankment out to the open sea. Further problems were encountered when urgent repairs were found to be needed to the embankment and to the reinforced concrete bridge constructed in 1923-4 to replace an earlier timber structure.

The IWCC finally assumed responsibility for the toll road and embankment in October 1971 and immediately abolished the collection of tolls.

2.3.3 SEA TRANSPORT

The Brading Harbour Company built a slipway near St Helens Quay (adjacent to the present Brading Haven Yacht Club) for importing railway carriages, locomotives and coal trucks; these were winched off the vessel straight ashore on to the railway lines. In 1911 a new quay was opened on the north side of the Yar sluice. Small cargo vessels (under 250 tons) continued to sail into the harbour until the railway line was closed in 1953. The gas works was located at the western end of St Helens north quay.

Coastguards, a team of twelve men and a senior, were based at the Watch House overlooking the beach by Bembridge Point. They lived in the nearby coastguard cottages. Pilots also lived in the vicinity.

2.3.3.1 Harbour Master

The Harbour Master has statutory control of the Harbour, and the General Manager of the Harbour Company is responsible for the commercial operation of the harbour. Sometimes the two roles have been combined.

During the 1930s and 1940s the Harbour Master was Herbert Occomore, succeeded in 1946 by Mike Attrill. Major Charles Selwyn was General Manager of the Harbour Company from 1969, but in 1987 Michael Coombes combined the two jobs, as does Captain Graham Hall who succeeded him in 1992.

2.3.3.2 Freight services

In order to compete with Newport, in August 1885 the Isle of Wight Marine Transit Company (another 'Liberator' company) began a freight service between St Helens Quay and Langstone Harbour, where it connected with the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway. This service was not a success and closed down in 1888. However it was succeeded by other freight services operating from St Helens Quay, delivering coal and coke to the gas works as well as coal and miscellaneous goods for rail forwarding as well as local use. In return the ships took cement

while the cement works lasted, scrap, and gravel dredged from the harbour.

During the inter-war years barges from Portsmouth and London delivered coal to St Helens Quay and would then cross the Harbour to load with sand from Bembridge Point for the return trip. Scrap was brought by lorry to St Helens Quay where it was loaded for shipment to the Mainland. Motor barges owned by Chaplins and Pickfords provided a freight service during the late 1920s and 1930s. The Quay also acted as a breaker's yard for old railway running stock.

After the second war, in parallel with the decline in railway traffic, the Quay gradually closed to commercial shipping. Later terraced houses and blocks of flats were built upon much of the old quays.

2.3.3.3 Passenger services

In the early days people wishing to visit the small village of Bembridge had either to approach via Brading or use the highway from Ryde to the Duver and then cross the entrance to the Harbour by ferry: a rowing boat for pedestrians or a barge for coach and horses.

A small pier was built in 1886 in proximity to the new Bembridge Station and a privately owned launch, Blanche, plied between Bembridge, Seaview and Southsea carrying passengers. In turn this was followed by passenger steamers, twin screw vessels, and a large paddle steamer, Alexandra, which proved too big. At low tides the vessels moored at Tyne Ledge and the passengers were rowed ashore (Hollis 1964).

2.3.4 LEISURE AND INDUSTRY

2.3.4.1 Leisure

BHI&RC built the prestigious Spithead Hotel beside the railway terminus at Bembridge. It opened on 19 July 1882 six weeks after the opening of the branch line, and quickly became successful. In the same year, the Isle of Wight Golf Club was founded, with a 9-hole links on the Duver and its headquarters in the Spithead Hotel. In 1883 Queen Victoria bestowed royal patronage on both hotel and golf club.

In 1895 the Isle of Wight Ladies' Golf Club was founded on reclaimed land behind the Harbour Embankment. The Club headquarters was just to the North East of Harbour Farm. Owing to the increasing interest in golf, the roof of the Royal Spithead Hotel was raised to cope with the influx of golfing guests.

In 1886 Colonel Moreton and Captain Du Boulay started the Isle of Wight Corinthian Yacht Club, in 1889 renamed Bembridge Sailing Club to avoid confusion with other yacht clubs opening on the island. The club's original headquarters was a wooden engine shed from North Quay supplied by the manager of BHI&RC, replaced in 1897 by the present clubhouse. From the beginning, emphasis was placed on the sailing and racing of day boats, and in 1896 the distinctive Redwing class was founded.

With easier access, the villages gained in popularity as leisure resorts. In 1899 *Black's Guide to the Isle of Wight* comments 'the Sailing Club vies with the golf as an attraction to visitors of the better class. In short, Bembridge is a select rather than a popular resort'.

In 1951, when sailing was popular among a wider society, Brading Haven Yacht Club was founded by Captain Caws and Mr Lingman. Three classes of boats were introduced for racing: Solent Scows, Havens, and Swans -- all built by local boatbuilder A A Coombes.

During the inter-war years, houseboats began to appear around the edges of the harbour -- barges, dismasted large sailing boats and motor cruisers. These were, with one exception, used only in the summer.

2.3.4.2 Boatyards

The popularity of the Harbour for boating resulted in the establishment of boatyards and other support industries such as Bowen, Woodnutts and Wades, followed later by Attrill and Keith Nelson.

In 1899, Alfred Westmacott formed a new boatbuilding and engineering firm, Westmacott Stewart & Co., with premises on the Duver at the site of the established yard Kirby Bowen. The 35 foot long cutter 'Fatima' was one of the first vessels designed and built by the firm. After 3 years Westmacott formed a new company to run the yard and to buy out the old-established sailmaking business of Woodnutt. The new firm, Woodnutt & Co. designed and built craft and marine engines, continued sailmaking and established a chandlery store (Leather, 1994). In the early 1900s Walter Wade started W F Wade on the site of the present Harbour Engineering.

Pleasure sailing soon recovered after the first war and the boatyards prospered. In 1925, Ernest Wade, son of Walter, began his own boat building and engineering firm. In 1938 he moved to what is now Bembridge Boatyard. He was the Harbour Pilot and also ferried Trinity House pilots to and from the liners as they entered or left the Solent.

A year before World War II began, Woodnutts built the prototype Fairmile ML. During the war Woodnutts, employing about 200 workers, assembled 26 patrol boats of Admiralty design: Fairmile classes A, B, C and D. The timber was pre-cut on the Mainland. They also built airborne lifeboats which were carried underneath aircraft and dropped by means of 3 to 5 drogue chutes into the sea. The other yards in the Harbour were involved by either sub-contract from Woodnutts or by their employees moving over to Woodnutts to work.

2.3.4.3 Trade

The major shops of Bembridge village were in the harbour area: Sothcotts General Stores with adjoining hardware store provided groceries and provisions for both local residents and for the vessels at anchor, as did the abattoir supplying fresh meat, and various small chandlers.

Tradesmen worked and lived in the area of Bembridge which was known as 'The Point'. These included a carpenter and boatbuilder, Henry Damp, and a coal-merchant, William Jacobs whose supplies arrived by sea. He forwarded goods to all parts of the Island via the railway, and was also the local carrier.

The harbour had always been used for commercial fishing: there were oysters and substantial fish stocks in the former Brading Haven, but more important in terms of overall trade were the many fishing vessels based in the harbour but working outside it.

2.3.4.4 Catering

From about 1650 until 1900 an inn stood on the site of the present Ferry House on the Duver, providing services for those using the ferry between Bembridge and St Helens. After the second war, the Ferry Boat inn was reopened by the Attrill family, who have a 160-year history of innkeeping and ferry provision on the site (Attrill 1994).

For the Bembridge community, trade in the vicinity of the station and harbour increased and by the end of the 1880s the area had four hotels: the Pilot Boat Hotel -- named for the pilot boats that left from the area; the Bembridge Hotel; the Royal Spithead Hotel; the Marine Hotel, formerly and later called the Row Barge after the boats which provisioned the ships at anchor off Spithead. There was also the Prince of Wales public house and various drinking establishments.

2.3.5 MILITARY USAGE

2.3.5.1 World War I

In the years before the first war there had been talk of establishing a flotilla of torpedo boats in the Harbour to aid in the defence of Portsmouth. Nothing came of this, perhaps because it would have entailed a thorough dredging of the Harbour and channel at Admiralty expense (Du Boulay 1911). However, during the war a seaplane base was established on the harbour side of Bembridge Point, where the concrete pad still exists beneath the sand. The enlisted men from the base were housed in the Royal Spithead Hotel while the officers lived in the Bembridge Hotel. There were groundings at Forelands and sinkings nearby, but whether any of this affected the Harbour is unknown.

2.3.5.2 World War II

Bembridge Harbour and Culver Cliff were in the line of the bombing run to Portsmouth, and there was an anti-aircraft gun sited on the Duver. During the war, personal use of boats in the harbour was prohibited (Coombes 1995).

In 1942 three Navy-converted North Sea trawlers would anchor by day in St Helens Roads and at night steal away to the French coast, returning the next morning. Early one June morning low flying German planes strafed and bombed them at anchor. One sank with all hands despite the shallow water. The men were in their bunks asleep after a hard night's work (Wade, 1994).

Before raids in Europe, Marine Commandos trained on the nearby cliffs, the sand dunes and in the Harbour.

As D-day approached, Bembridge Harbour was crammed with ammunition and petrol barges so that the only open water was the channel. One day one of the covering tarpaulins caught fire and, but for the action of an alert corporal, there might have been a disaster and the Haven once more opened to the sea.

In her diary of the war, Lady Baldwin who lived at The Castle, St Helens, overlooking the harbour writes

`it was about this time we saw all sorts of queer things, huge masses like floating docks being slowly towed down the Solent, big raft-like objects which carried enormous things like factory chimneys. Very tantalising, having no idea what they could be. Then, after the war ended, what a thrill I got to hear the exact description and explanation of what we had seen, in the wonderful `Mulberry broadcast'.'

Again, on 6 June 1944, Lady Baldwin writes

`The Day has come. Most of the ships have vanished, and I saw about fifty barges going out at one time -- there have, of course, been hundreds' (Baldwin 1946).

2.4 DEVELOPMENTS TO THE PRESENT

Only activity affecting the harbour as a whole is considered here. More detailed information on industry, housing and leisure activities is given in the section on Harbour Usage.

In 1925 Sir Edward and Lady Poulton donated the Common land between Duver Road and the Mill Pond (including Gaggan Edge) to the **National Trust**.

In 1926 a **storm breached the Duver seawall** at the northern end. This gap was repaired.

In 1929 the wall was again broken, this time near the southern end where it was repaired with sheet piling.

In 1961 the Royal Isle of Wight Golf Club presented the **Duver Golf Links**, which had not been used since before the war, to the National Trust.

In 1968 the Harbour was sold by British Railways to the **Bembridge Harbour Improvements Company (BHIC)**. The enabling Act of Parliament, the *Pier and Harbour Order (Bembridge Harbour) Confirmation Act* of 1963, was a private member's bill submitted by **Mark Woodnutt MP**, who was also a major figure in the company. BHIC retained the harbour bed up to high water mark (Map 2:3), but the property surrounding the Harbour was sold off in various lots. The Embankment and toll road were subsequently purchased by the County Council; the Spithead Hotel had already been acquired in 1947 by **Major Charles Selwyn**, while much of the remaining land was bought by **Yarland Properties**.

In 1970 Bembridge Station was demolished to make way for the building of the Harbour Strand houses. St Helens Station was converted to a private home.

Map 2:3 Seabed Ownership

Sketch map indicating the extent of the ownership of the seabed by BHIC. Land ownership is not shown.

In 1972 **BHIC** made a planning application to develop private housing on the marsh side of **Embankment Road**. This was turned down by the local councils and was finally refused in 1974 after going to appeal.

In 1981, The owners of **BHIC** (and Yarland Properties Ltd) sold out to **Zanen Dredging**. Zanen dredged the channel which had been very much neglected, and in 1984 dredged out and built **Fisherman's Wharf**, a facility much appreciated by local fishermen.

In 1987 an application by **Zanen** for a development of 90 dwellings and a marina on **Embankment Road** in the houseboat area was refused. Zanen made a second application to develop the Point area, but this was withdrawn because sale of BHIC was pending.

In 1989 the **Royal Spithead Hotel** was sold to developers after serving since the war as a hotel/ restaurant and later a dormitory for **Greylands College**. Despite protests, the imposing building, which had deteriorated considerably, was demolished. Subsequently, plans were approved, on appeal to the Department of the Environment, for the erection of a block of 27 flats on the site. The site is at the time of writing subject to a further planning application.

Zanen Dredging was itself taken over in 1988 by **Associated London Properties (ALP) Westminster Dredging**. The new owners submitted an application in 1989 for the construction of 80 housing units on three sites in the area, one of those being the Point. A housing and marina complex was to be based in the southeast corner of the harbour necessitating the dredging out and removal of **Point Beach** up to the old sea wall, and relocation of BHIC offices, **Bembridge Sailing Club** and the **Tollgate Cafe** to Bembridge Point.

In 1989, in response to the growing concerns of many people, both on the Island and Mainland, about developmental proposals for the Harbour, public meetings were held. Subsequently, the non-political **Bembridge and St Helens Harbour Association** was formed (Appendix B).

On the initiative of **South Wight Borough Council (SWBC)**, a **Bembridge Harbour Working Party** was set up in 1989 to consider the harbour's future. The group comprised representatives from IWCC, SWBC, Medina Borough Council, Bembridge and St Helens Parish Councils and Brading Town Council, the National Rivers Authority (NRA) and two non-voting members of Bembridge and St Helens Harbour Association. BHIC had an input, and representatives of conservation groups also contributed. Eight main issues were identified as requiring investigation (Appendix C).

As a result of thorough investigation of the various development options, the Joint Working Group made recommendations to SWBC. Concern was expressed that the application would have detrimental effects not only on conservation resources but also on the character of the area.

In February, 1991 **SWBC** rejected the revised planning application submitted by ALP. Certain policies such as confirmation of the **Strategic Gap** between St Helens and Bembridge and the discouragement of building on the Point area were confirmed as desirable guidelines for future planning.

In 1990 **Belize Investments** bought the Harbour from ALP, and has subsequently initiated many improvements.

In 1991 the IWCC and the NRA, after considerable consultation, embarked on a project to replace the flawed **road bridge** over the **River Yar** and the outfall built in 1874 with an ambitious joint structure. Building commenced in 1992 and has encountered several delays. The new structure should considerably improve control of water levels in the **Brading Marshes** area and two way traffic will vastly improve access to the Harbour area.

In recent years, support has been growing for the possible purchase of the harbour and the establishment of a **charitable trust** to run it.

2.5 CONCLUSIONS

The limitations of time, space and availability of source material in some areas, have restricted the depth of coverage of this section. Personal interviews have revealed a considerable amount of valuable information which has been recorded for future use, although it is not included here.

It is essential to recognise that history is dynamic and continually evolving. What is certain is that people concerned with the area, in whatever capacity, are deeply aware of its value.

2.5.1 Recommendations for future research

1. Using primary sources such as County maps, records and archives, compile additional information on the development of the Harbour.
2. Conduct and record further interviews with local and other people who have personal knowledge of the commercial and social development of the harbour, to contribute to the formal history of the harbour and also to form an oral and written history resource.

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Appendix A: Relevant Acts of Parliament

1847 Harbours, Docks and Piers Act

1858 Yar Bridge Act

1874 Brading Harbour Improvements, Railway and Works Act

1881 Brading Harbour Improvements, Railway and Works, Additional Powers Act

1896 Brading Harbour Railway Act

1898 Isle of Wight Railway Act

1930 Land Drainage Act

1949 Coastal Protection Act

1963 Pier and Harbour Order (Bembridge Harbour) Confirmation Act

Hollis (1964) includes an analysis of many of these acts.

Appendix B: Aims and objectives of Bembridge and St Helens Harbour Association

To collate information regarding Bembridge Harbour and the surrounding areas and reflect the informed and independent views of local residents, visitors and harbour users.

To propose, facilitate and update long-term policy for the harbour and surrounding areas including, but not limited to: dredging, funding, maintenance, management and ownership.

To encourage a balance between the natural environment of the Harbour and its commercial, environmental and recreational uses.

To encourage within statutory and other appropriate authorities positive initiatives which improve the appearance and use of the harbour and surrounding areas and are compatible with the agreed structure, policies and views of the community.

To encourage the community to cooperate effectively in response to any proposals concerning the Harbour and surrounding areas.

Appendix C: Eight main issues identified as requiring investigation

Extract of report in Isle of Wight County Press, 27 December 1989

First step is taken to agree planning policy

The **Bembridge Harbour Working Group** agreed to form a representative sub-group to produce a draft policy document within the next six months.

The three Island authorities agreed eight main issues to be considered in monitoring planning applications affecting the Harbour and surrounding area. They were:

Finding a balance between an operational Harbour and retaining the Harbour's landscape and nature conservation resources.

Assessing a future acceptable mooring capacity for the Harbour and by what means this might be achieved.

Looking at the implications of Harbour developments on employment, tourism and leisure.

Identifying sites where visual improvements to existing shore side marine/industrial land uses could enhance the general appearance of the Harbour and consider how they might be achieved.

Discussing the future of the houseboats.

Determining if any proposals for development set a precedent for future applications.

Considering the implications of any marine-related residential development adding to the growing number of second homes in the area.

Assessing the effect on sea defences as a result of dredging etc.