

There are more than one hundred ports and harbours in the UK and Ireland, ranging from large port cities like London, Liverpool, Southampton, Dublin to small coastal towns like Ramsgate, Whitstable and Sligo. They all make a significant contribution to the identity and distinctiveness of their region creating a unique landscape that reflect the history, the development of maritime technologies and settlements and the impact on the inland areas. Many ports and harbours are still in active use as important hubs for maritime trade and travel, others have developed an economic value and importance derived from their contribution to the tourism industry. Nonetheless, all ports and harbours require maintenance and planning strategies to face the forces of change and the reuse of historic heritage is an essential resource.

The nature and extent of conservation and reuse of the port heritage and historic environment vary between ports depending on whether the volume of port heritage is significant, if there are listed buildings and infrastructures such as warehouses, lighthouses, pump houses, bridges, piers and walls within the port boundaries and if the listed buildings are in use.

The relationship between the port and its associated historic heritage also varies and is very much dependent on the impact of port activities on the wider and inland areas and on the governance structure.

It is also worth noticing that ports and harbours in the UK are owned by various institutions and organisations. There are Military Ports (e.g. Portsmouth and Plymouth), Municipal Ports owned by local authorities (e.g. Portsmouth International Port, Sunderland), Trust Ports that are independent statutory bodies (e.g. Dover, Poole) and Private Ports owned by private companies (e.g. ABP, Peel Ports). In addition, as master planning guidance is non-statutory, there is no obligation on ports to choose to include the historic heritage within their plan. (Fisher Assoc. Ltd 2014, 29).

Indeed, not many ports have long term plans for the development of their historic heritage nor that the latter is included as an asset in their current strategies; moreover, when the relevance of the historic heritage is acknowledged, different ways of tackling the issue are being pursued. Some, as is the case of the port of Ramsgate, have secured a partnership with heritage associations searching for support to develop their strategy.

The historic heritage and its reuse have a different meaning to each port.

For some ports, the historic heritage is essential (e.g. Chichester, Tyne). Other ports have different priority such as unemployment and/or improving socio-economic domain, although they acknowledge the reuse of port heritage as an opportunity to attract tourism which in turn could reduce unemployment (e.g. Ramsgate).

Many ports feature such a vast and varied historic heritage (e.g. Liverpool, Sheerness) that the ownership is sceptical of their potential benefits, particularly if they cannot be reused, as in many cases of listed buildings within a working port environment.

This section presents two articles that focus on a British and an Irish case study.

Piga's article values the commendable attempt to deliver a heritage-led regeneration project in Sheerness, a small port town on the English south-eastern coast, where the remains of an operational dockyard supply significant architecture and urban assets to be restored and appropriately re-used to boost the socio-economic recovery. Once one of the major Royal Navy Dockyard of the region, the port town began its decline in the 1960s when the dockyard was wound down and associated buildings and structures abandoned. The article provides all the details of the small port town rough pathway to success.

Joye and Kelleher briefly introduce the history of the development of the Port of Dublin to focus on the enduring engagement programme of the Dublin Port Company to reintegrate Dublin Port with Dublin City. Through a masterplan set out in 2012 and a series of heritage projects that would benefit from Port Archive and Heritage Infrastructure, the Dublin Port Company aims to open up the area around the Port, to soften and enliven its boundaries to the City by creating new public spaces and facilities, and sponsoring arts, architecture, history and folklore through a multi-faceted initiative.

The authors illustrate the projects that the Dublin Port Company has already accomplished as well as its future plans.

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