

The Last Days of Hythe Harbour

**Text by
MAURICE YOUNG
Artwork by
JANINE UMBERS**

CHRONOLOGY

55BC - early 5th Century AD Roman occupation. Portus Lemanis, at the start of 'Stone Street' becomes one of the main entry ports into Britain. Building of Stutfall (c275) - one of 10 forts all later under unified command, built to defend the 'Saxon Shore'. Town clusters round port and road in area of present-day West Hythe.

597AD Augustine reaches Canterbury.

1026 Manor of Saltwood and Hythe gifted to the Priory at Canterbury, the document signed by King Canute. Hythe already a Borough and bought by Canute's successor Edward the Confessor into a system of coastal defence not unlike the Roman command organisation; this was the origin of the Cinque Ports.

? Silting up of Roman Port and migration of town eastwards.

1066 Norman Conquest. Manor of Saltwood given to Christchurch, Canterbury.

c1080 Building of Church of St Leonard in Hythe.

1086 Domesday Book. The 225 'Burgesses of Hede' belonged to the Manor of Saltwood.

1107 First phase of building now known as 'Centuries' begun on main route from Harbour to Saltwood and Canterbury.

1120 Prosperous times for Hythe. St Leonards Church enlarged. Port active.

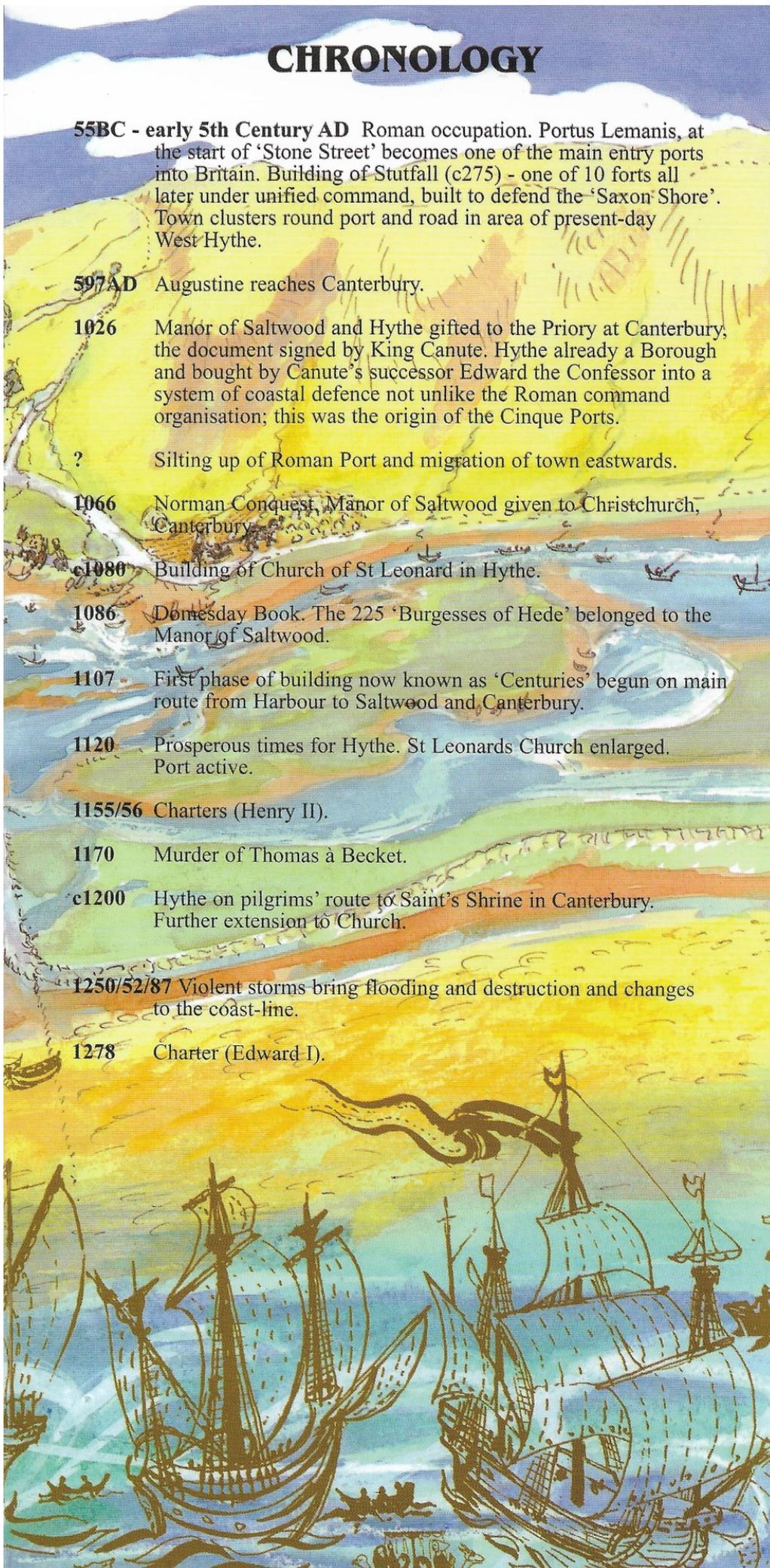
1155/56 Charters (Henry II).

1170 Murder of Thomas à Becket.

c1200 Hythe on pilgrims' route to Saint's Shrine in Canterbury. Further extension to Church.

1250/52/87 Violent storms bring flooding and destruction and changes to the coast-line.

1278 Charter (Edward I).



FRONT MAP

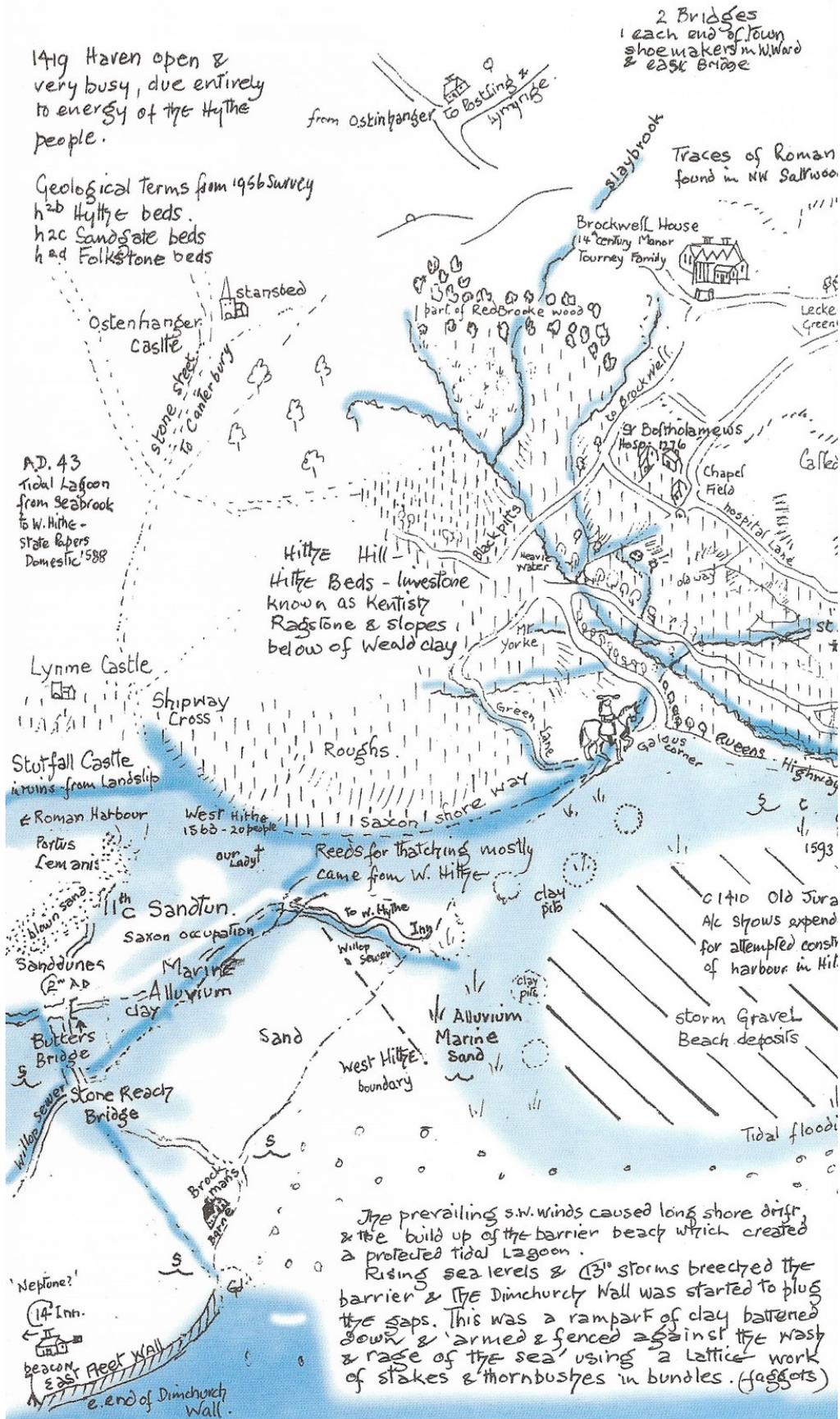
possible scenario to the 16th century harbour & earlier

The havyn is a pretty rode and liith mealty strait for passage of Boleyn*, yt crokety yn so by the shore a long and is so bakked fro the mayne le with callings of thingil that small shippes may cum up a large myle towards Folkestan as in a lure sut. Leland VIII reign.
* Boulogne

1419 Haven open & very busy, due entirely to energy of the Hythe people.

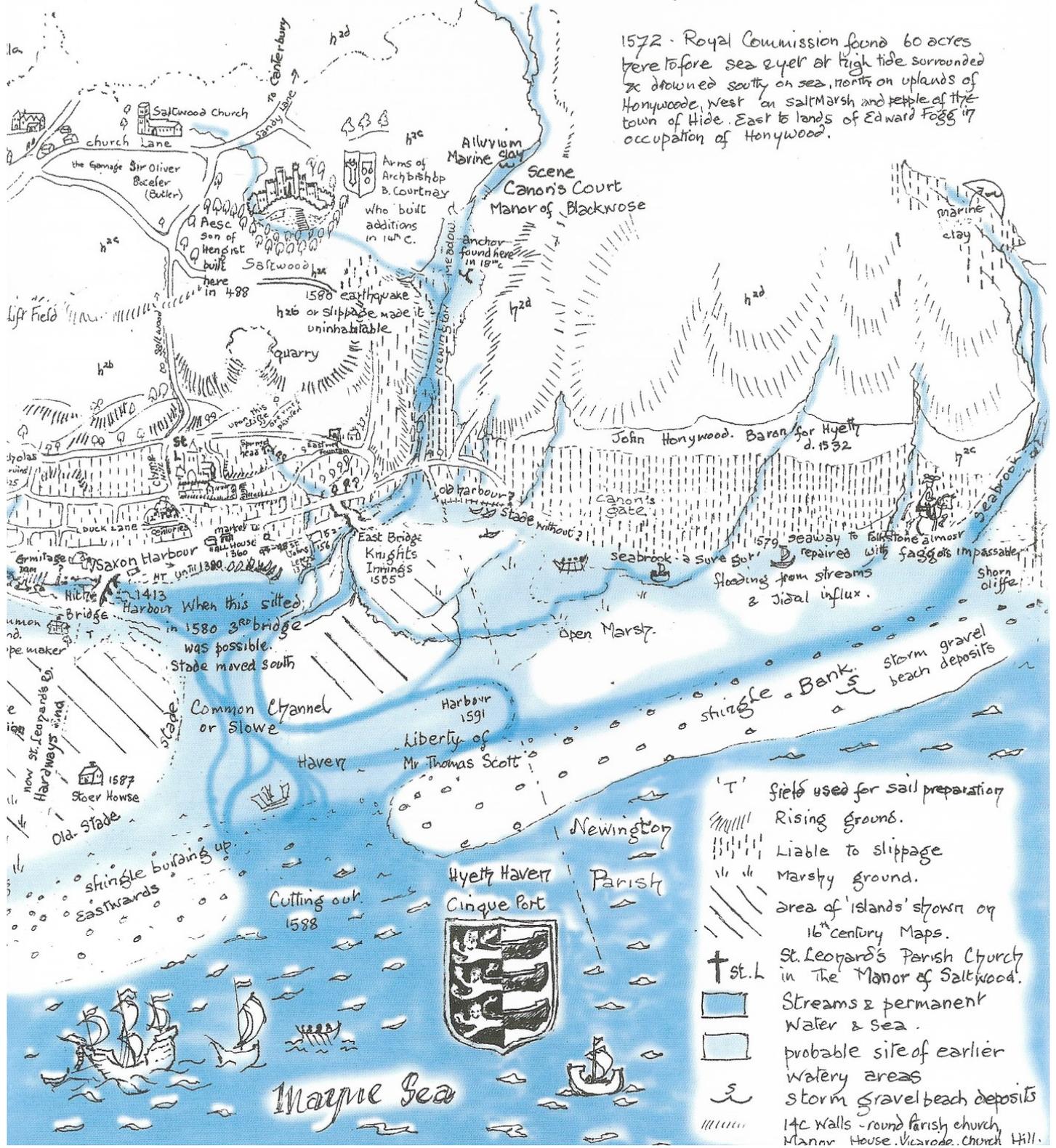
Geological terms from 1956 survey
h2b Hythe beds
h2c Sandstone beds
h2d Folkstone beds

A.D. 43 Tidal Lagoon from Seabrook to W. Hythe - State Papers Domestic 1588



1566 Survey. Creeks & landing places 2.
 1 called the Haven within the liberties;
 the other called the Stade, without the liberties.
 It had inhabited houses . 122.
 It had shipping, for the most part occupied
 in fishing 160, but also passenger traffic
 with the continent & in victualing the
 Garrison in Calais.
 There was Customer, Controller, Searcher
 their Authority severah
 Boulogne & Calais lost in 1550 & 1558
 Strips left in Wills declined from 80 in 1533 to 8 in 163

Elizabethan Survey 1566.
 The town, which contains about 200 houses
 is situated exceeding pleasant & healthy, on the
 side as well as at the foot of the quarry-hill,
 where the principal street is, which is of a
 handsome breadth & from the bridges at the
 extremities of it, about 1/2 mile in length. It
 has been lately new paved, & otherwise much
 improved. The Court-hall & market place
 are near the middle of it.



1572 - Royal Commission found 60 acres
 here before sea & yet at high tide surrounded
 & drowned south on sea, north on uplands of
 Honeywood, west on saltmarsh and kettle of the
 town of Hove. East to lands of Edward Fogg 17
 occupation of Honeywood.

- T fields used for sail preparation
- ~~~~~ Rising Grounds.
- ||||| Liable to slippage
- ||||| Marshy ground.
- ||||| area of 'islands' shown on 16th century Maps.
- † St. Leonard's Parish Church in the Manor of Saltwood.
- Streams & permanent water & sea.
- probable site of earlier watery areas
- ~ storm gravel beach deposits
- ||||| 14c Walls - round parish church, Manor House, Vicarage, Church Hill.



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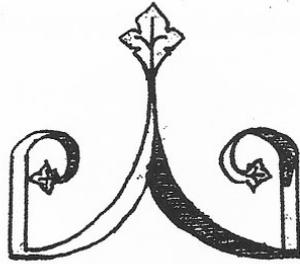
**Artwork by
JANINE UMBERS**



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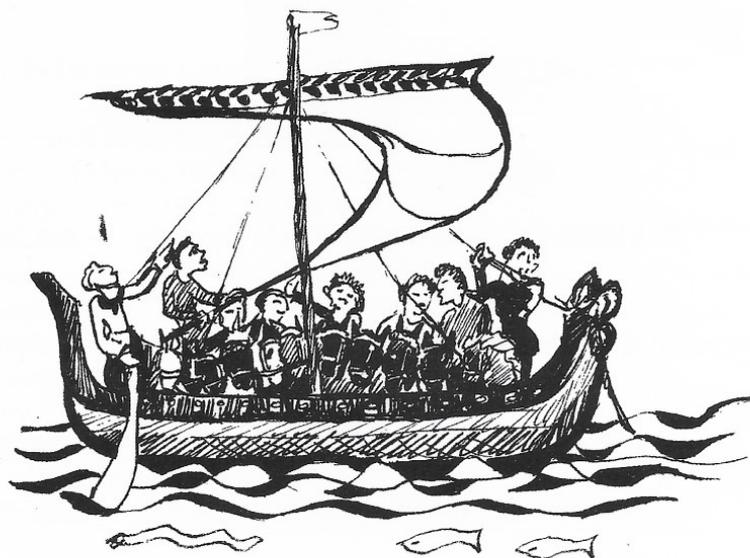
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Maps and Illustrations : Janine Umbers

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Other acknowledgements are in the text.



Prologue



This booklet attempts to outline the final years of the one-time harbour or haven at Hythe in Kent. The problem has been to interpret the information in the old records, which are never explicit. Terms such as 'old port', 'new port' and 'old stade' may refer to different locations at different times and are difficult to place with certainty.

That there was once a harbour, and a thriving one, with war-ships, merchant-men and fishing vessels sheltering from the open sea, is not in doubt. Its general location is known but it moved over time as did the access channels and openings into it. It certainly began near West Hythe, 3 miles to the west of the present town. There was a Bronze-age settlement here, fisherfolk one deduces, and near here later was the Roman Portus Lemanis, below Lympe, at the very start of Stone Street, the main road to Canterbury. Romney Bay then received the waters (and silt and debris too) of three rivers, the Tillingham, Brede, and Rother (formerly the Limen), and of other lesser streams, pouring down from the uplands behind. A bank of shingle protected the inner coastline from the open sea, and within that a desolate area of shingle banks, sand and mud flats, with inlets and creeks, and a sheltered lagoon with access possibly from the west near Greatstone and also from the east where one of the estuaries of the Rother met the incoming sea near present-day Seabrook. There may have been other inlets too, south from the Port.



At safe anchor here in this calm water rode the tiny fishing boats, and the larger merchant-men which supported the occupying Roman army - bringing reinforcements, warmer clothing and other supplies for troops on look-out in the far north, and mail from home. Most visible would have been the ships of Classis Britannica, the war fleet, protecting this vulnerable coast so close to the continental mainland from raiders and pirates. Later a large stone fort, 10 acres in area, was built above the landing point - the ruins at Stutfall (occupied probably 275-350AD) can be seen still. But in the dark unrecorded period after the Romans' departure in the early 5th Century, there came land-slip, dramatic changes to the coast-line with higher sea-levels, and a build-up of