

# Newhaven

## Historic Character Assessment Report

November 2004



Sussex Extensive Urban Survey (EUS)

*Roland B Harris*



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in association with Lewes District Council



The Sussex Extensive Urban Survey (Sussex EUS) is a study of 41 towns undertaken between 2004 and 2008 by an independent consultant (Dr Roland B Harris, BA DPhil MIFA) for East Sussex County Council (ESCC), West Sussex County Council (WSCC), and Brighton and Hove City Council; and was funded by English Heritage.

Guidance and web-sites derived from the historic town studies will be, or have been, developed by the local authorities.

All photographs and illustrations are by the author.

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*Cover photo: East Pier, Newhaven.*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the project

This report is an archaeological, historical, and historic urban character assessment of Newhaven. It is part of the Sussex Extensive Urban Survey (henceforth Sussex EUS) that examines 41 towns across the ancient county.<sup>1</sup>

The Sussex EUS forms part of a national programme of such surveys initiated by English Heritage in 1992. The national programme is already well underway, with roughly half the English counties having been completed or currently undergoing study.

As the surveys have progressed, the approach has developed. In line with recent surveys, the Sussex EUS includes more modern towns, the main significance of which stems from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Another recent innovation is the introduction of the characterization concept, comparable with the map-based techniques adopted by historic landscape characterization. This approach was developed in Lancashire (2000-4), and is further refined in Sussex.

The Sussex EUS has been funded by English Heritage, and supported in kind by the commissioning authorities: East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, and Brighton and Hove City Council. A wide range of stakeholders (including district and borough councils, and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) has supported the project.

In West Sussex the Sussex EUS forms part of the *Character of West Sussex Partnership Programme*,<sup>2</sup> aiming to provide guidance and advice on the protection and enhancement of all aspects of character in the county. Other historic environment projects come under this umbrella:

- Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) of Sussex
- Intensive Urban Survey of Chichester and Fishbourne
- Local Distinctiveness Study of West Sussex.

### 1.2 Aims and objectives

#### 1.2.1 Aims

The aim of the Sussex EUS is to deliver a unique and flexible tool to aid the understanding, exploration and management of the historic qualities of 41 of the most significant towns in Sussex with a view to:

- archaeological and historic environment research and management.
- informing strategic and local policy.
- underpinning urban historic land and buildings management and interpretation.
- encouraging the integration of urban historic characterization into the wider process of protecting and enhancing urban character.

#### 1.2.2 Objectives

Key objectives of the project include the:

- synthesis of previous archaeological and historical work.
- creation of a Geographic Information System (GIS) that maps and allows the analysis of archaeological events, monuments and urban plan components using information obtained from a variety of sources.
- analysis of the origins and development of each town by establishing and examining its principal plan components and existing standing structures.
- identification of county-wide Historic Character Types and attribution of the types to different areas within each town.
- preparation of a Statement of Historic Urban Character for each town, to include assessment of archaeological potential and Historic Environment Value.
- identification of gaps in the understanding of the past occupation and historical development of character of each town through the development of a Research Framework.
- advice to local authorities on the development of guidance derived from the town studies.

### 1.3 Outputs

The principal outputs of the project comprise:

- Historic character assessment reports. Documents (of which this is one) that, separately for each town, summarize the setting and pre-urban activity; synthesize current archaeological and historical research; describe the development from origins to the present day; assess the surviving historic character and historic environment value; and set out a framework for future research on the historic environment of the towns.
- Geographical Information System (GIS) for the historic environment of each town. The GIS underpins the analysis and mapping of the town

reports, and is available to local authorities as a unique tool to support their decision making. The EUS-generated GIS data includes historic buildings and archaeological data, and mapping of areas for which Historic Character Type, historic land use, and Historic Urban Character Areas have been defined. The GIS data will be maintained and updated by the West Sussex County Council *Sites & Monuments Record* (SMR) and the East Sussex County Council *Historic Environment Record* (HER).

- Informing historic environment management guidance specific to each local planning authority, for the 41 EUS towns and Winchelsea, produced under the new Local Development Frameworks, and subject to formal consultation procedures.
- Background papers for the Sussex EUS project. Documents that include the project design, a summary of the methodology and an overall bibliography.

## 1.4 The structure of this report

### 1.4.1 The Setting

This introductory section describes the topography, geology, communications, and pre-urban archaeology of the town.

### 1.4.2 History

The history of Newhaven in this report can be a brief summary only. It aims to synthesize published research, and to provide a chronological overview of the development of the town as seen from documentary sources. The focus is placed on those matters – such as origins, economy, trade and institutions – that are most closely related to the urban historic environment today. Aspects of the town’s history – such as the ecclesiastical, manorial, jurisdictional and more recent social history – are accorded less weight.

### 1.4.3 Archaeology

The archaeology section of this report draws on published and unpublished reports of excavations, archaeological assessments, and records of finds. This section also includes analysis of historic buildings (listed and non-listed) and the topography, drawing on large-scale maps of the town from 1838 onwards. Again, this section follows a chronological structure, and focuses on aspects of the material evidence of the town’s past that relate most closely to the historic environment today.

### 1.4.4 Statement of Historic Urban Character

Whereas sections on history and archaeology (above) explore the development of Newhaven over time, this part of the report considers and defines the physical evidence of the past in today’s townscape. It does this by means of a character-based approach, operating at three different scales: areas of common Historic Character Type; larger and topographically familiar Historic Urban Character Areas; and the whole town. Assessment is made of the Historic Environment Value of each of the Historic Urban Character Areas, taking account of the archaeological potential.

## 1.5 Principal sources

Newhaven has been the subject of modest archaeological and historical interest. The principal sources drawn on during the writing of this report are listed below. Many other sources have been used too, and full references have been given by use of endnotes.

### 1.5.1 History

There is no authoritative historical study of Newhaven, although the work of **Louis Salzman** for the *Victoria County History*, published in 1940, provides some useful detail.<sup>3</sup> Although not concerned with the town itself, articles by **Peter Brandon** and **John Farrant** are more thorough in their analysis and provide an understanding of the important issues of the changing course of the River Ouse and the development of the port of Newhaven from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>4</sup> There is no scholarly study of the development of the Newhaven Fort and the preceding batteries, so primary archives at East Sussex Record Office and Newhaven Fort have been consulted.

### 1.5.2 Archaeology

There has been just one modern archaeological excavation within the EUS study area, in 1971-4 prior to the construction of **South Way** (the inner ring road) and associated development. However, while this excavation is most often cited for its discovery of a Romano-British villa, its excavator, **Martin Bell**, undertook and published an exemplary investigation that ranged from the Pleistocene landforms to the post-medieval archaeology and history of the site.<sup>5</sup>

The **East Sussex Historic Environment Record** (HER) database has been invaluable for providing the pre-urban archaeological context.

### 1.5.3 Historic buildings

Newhaven has a modest number of historic buildings, none of which appears to have been the subject of archaeological study. English Heritage’s statutory list of historic buildings is also of use, though many of the descriptions were necessarily produced without internal inspection. Very limited fieldwork only was possible during this assessment and focused on correcting dating derived from such sources, identifying hitherto ignored buildings of historic interest, and re-evaluating the dating and function of key buildings and monuments.

### 1.5.4 Geology and topography

The contextual discussion of the solid and drift geology has principally derived from 1:50,000 British Geological Survey digital data. Ordnance Survey Historic 25” maps for Epochs 1-4 (1882 onwards) have proved invaluable, especially as these have been used in digital form, allowing overlaying with each other and with other data.

The 1838 Tithe Map (*East Sussex Record Office*) captures pre-railway Newhaven at a large scale. This map has been digitized and rectified to fit the National Grid to allow comparison with other maps and data. Vertical air photo coverage of 2000 provides a useful snapshot in time. All analysis and maps utilize the most recent large-scale Ordnance Survey mapping (digital MasterMap data).

### 1.6 Area covered by the report

The Sussex EUS assessment of Newhaven covers the historic core of the town, harbour and fort, as defined by the 1<sup>st</sup> series 25” Ordnance Survey (1882). The wider and more recent suburbs are covered by the parallel project of the Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) for Sussex.

Newhaven is one of five towns in Lewes District that have assessments such as this. The others are Ditchling, Lewes, Peacehaven and Seaford.

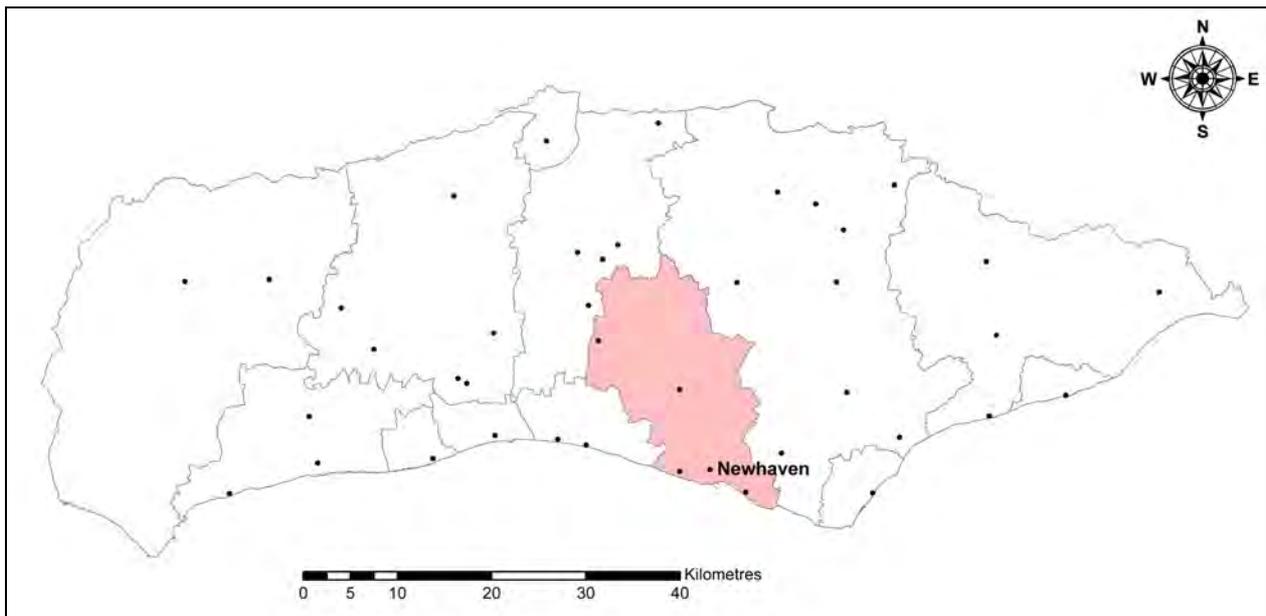


Fig. 1. Location of Newhaven within Sussex. Lewes District is highlighted and points locate the 41 Sussex EUS towns.

## 2 THE SETTING



Fig. 2. Newhaven from the east, with the railway to Seaford and Mill Creek in the foreground.

### 2.1 Topography (Map 2)

Newhaven is located on the River Ouse, which flows southwards through a gap in the South Downs. Harbour works extend to the outfall of the river in the English Channel. The historic core of the town is located on a slight spur of the downs that projects into the west side of the river valley (favouring a crossing here), rising from c.3m OSBM at the lower end of Bridge Street to c.54m OSBM at the old workhouse on Church Hill. Newhaven Fort is located immediately west of the mouth of the River Ouse, on the cliff-top.

Off-shore contours measured by bathymetric survey are steeply sloped in the Newhaven area and are not likely to be a product of erosion. This suggests that, despite the rapidity of recent cliff erosion, the prehistoric coast was within 1km of that today.<sup>6</sup>

The settlement lies on the old coast road (A259), although this has been modified to bypass the church and, via a ring road, the town centre.

The town occupies the greater part of Peacehaven Civil Parish, created out of the southern part of Piddinghoe parish in 1929.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.2 Geology (Map 2)

#### 2.2.1 Solid geology

Along with the whole of Sussex, the rocks in the vicinity of Newhaven are sedimentary. The town lies on the South Downs, so that the entire area is underlain by the relatively pure limestones of, from youngest to oldest, the Tarrant and Newhaven Chalk Formations (Upper Cretaceous). The uplifting and gentle folding of the chalk began 70-75 million years ago and continued beyond the end of the Cretaceous period (65 million years ago) until as recently as 1.8 million years ago. The uppermost solid geology of south-west part of Newhaven Fort and, outside the EUS study area, the western suburbs of the town (Northdown Road and Tideway School), however, is the sandstone and mudstone (commonly clay) of the Lambeth Group, being Tertiary (Palaeocene) irregular beds laid down on the eroded chalk. The Cretaceous-Tertiary junction is exposed in the cliffs at Castle Hill, running west from Newhaven Fort (Fig. 3). The top of Castle Hill is surmounted by an outcrop of London Clay (Eocene).

#### 2.2.2 Drift Geology

The drift geology of the Newhaven area shows that the scoured and embanked drainage channel that is the River Ouse today is surrounded by reclaimed marshland. Alluvium marks the location of the former marshy estuary of the Ouse. The post-medieval changeable course of the Ouse and its shifting outfall are discussed in section 3.2.1, but the earlier estuary would have been distinguished by multiple and changeable channels. The distinctive dry valleys of the downs (overlain by the northern and southern suburbs of the modern town) are largely a product of periglacial erosion.<sup>8</sup>

Geoarchaeological study has shown that the alluvium fills a Pleistocene buried channel (to a depth of -25.87m OSBM); a probable cliff line at the edge of the Ouse alluvium corresponds with the western side of Chapel Street; west, or up-slope, of the alluvium, post-Roman colluvial or slope deposits (of eroded Pleistocene strata from further up the slope) have accumulated to a depth of up to 1.5m over Roman levels; and, again west of the alluvium, the chalk is overlain by reworked Palaeogene deposits of clay-with-flints.<sup>9</sup> A high energy storm or barrier beach formed across the estuary, probably in the

Middle to Late Holocene, with the removal of beach barrier conditions and the extension of estuarine and floodplain conditions across the valley in the last 2000 years.<sup>10</sup>



Fig. 3. Cliffs at Castle Hill below the fort and the coastguard station, showing junction of the Upper and Middle Chalk Formations and the Lambeth Group.

## 2.3 Communications

### 2.3.1 Water

Both Newhaven and its medieval precursor (Meeching) were located directly on the River Ouse, with the harbour of the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards suitable for sea-going vessels. Upstream communication was also essential, as between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries Newhaven functioned as the outpost of Lewes (9km north), and the Ouse provided access into the Weald. The river between Lewes and Newhaven was canalized rapidly after the formation of the Lower Ouse Navigation Company in 1791, and from Lewes to Upper Ryelands Bridge (2.5km south-east of Balcombe) in 1790-1812, by the Upper Ouse Navigation Company.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.3.2 Road

Newhaven lies on the A259 (the main Seaford-Brighton road). The road was turnpiked in 1824.<sup>12</sup> Roads reach the town from Lewes,

either side of the Ouse valley: that via Southease and Piddinghoe is a rural lane, whilst the eastern road (historically, the Lewes-Seaford road) is now a trunk road (A26). Within the town the movement of traffic on through routes and to the port has been eased since 1974 by creation of an inner ring road, a new swing bridge over the Ouse, and, to the east of the latter, a small flyover.

### 2.3.3 Railway

The London Brighton and South Coast Railway (LBSCR) opened a line from Lewes to Newhaven in 1847. This connected to the Brighton-London line via the Lewes-Keymer Junction (Burgess Hill) line of 1847, and to the Brighton-Bulverhithe/St Leonards line (1846). The Lewes-Newhaven line was extended to Seaford in 1864.<sup>13</sup> Initially there were two stations at Newhaven: Newhaven Town Station and Newhaven Wharf Station. Newhaven Harbour Station was added in 1886, further south and also on the east of the Ouse.<sup>14</sup> Confusingly, this is now known as Newhaven Marine Station, and the station to the north as Newhaven Harbour Station. The Newhaven-Lewes line and the Seaford extension remain in use. By 1879, the West Harbour railway (anticipated in 1863<sup>15</sup>) had been built, crossing the Ouse by the same swing bridge as the road traffic. Almost immediately this was joined by a horse-drawn tramway from Meeching Quarry and whiting works. The West Harbour railway was extended to the breakwater when built (1879-83). These lines to the west of the river closed in 1963.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.4 Evidence for pre-urban activity

### 2.4.1 Prehistoric

Within the EUS study area, one excavation has produced prehistoric archaeology:

- **South Way** – excavations in 1971-4 recovered 156 pieces of Palaeolithic (500000 BC to 10001 BC) flint waste and one possible tool from ice wedges, with the Palaeolithic ground level itself subsequently eroded.<sup>17</sup>

Outside the EUS study area there have been other prehistoric discoveries:

- **First Avenue** – Lower Palaeolithic (an unrolled Middle Acheulian) handaxe (500000 BC to 150001 BC) was during building operations in 1949 [HER reference:TQ 40 SW43 – ES1780].

- Tideway School – Mesolithic (10000 BC to 4001 BC) flint flakes, core and hammer-stone, and a Bronze Age (2350 BC to 701 BC) cremation in an inverted urn were discovered during terracing in 1973 for the construction of a new gymnasium [HER reference: TQ 40 SW68 – ES1807].

- 30 Lee Way – Neolithic (4000 BC to 2351 BC) polished flint axe found in the garden in 1962 [HER reference: TQ 40 SW45 – ES1781].

- Castle Hill – probable Late Bronze Age enclosure or hillfort, recognized from the 17th century. The earthworks no longer survive, in part destroyed by the construction of the 19th-century fort. Pottery from Iron Age and Romano-British periods accounts for the uncertainty of the dating [HER reference: TQ 40 SW33 – ES1794].<sup>18</sup>

Several prehistoric finds have been made at unspecified 'Newhaven' locations:

- 3 Lower Palaeolithic handaxes have been found in Newhaven [HER reference: TQ 40 SW61 – ES1804].

- A Mesolithic Thames pick was found at Newhaven [HER reference: TQ 40 SW24 – ES1788].

- Three Neolithic polished flints axes from Newhaven. One was found in 1890 [HER reference: TQ 40 SW25 – ES1789].

#### **2.4.2 Romano-British**

There is no reliably identified major Roman road in the area, with the nearest being the London-Lewes road. However, Margary has suggested a Romano-British route from Newhaven to Selmeston to Dicker, and thinks it likely that a coastal road from the Brighton area to Newhaven existed too, passing the church and crossing the Ouse of the pre-1863 route, although no trace remains.<sup>19</sup>

One excavation has produced significant evidence of Roman activity in the EUS study area:

- **South Way** – excavations in 1971-4 revealed an early villa occupied during the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> and much of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>20</sup>

Elsewhere in the town, there have been Romano-British finds:

- Newhaven Fort – Romano-British pottery was found during levelling of the east side of Newhaven Fort in 1970, prior to the building of housing. As with earlier finds made during the construction of the fort in the 1860s,<sup>21</sup> this

suggests a Romano-British settlement on the spur east of the Late Bronze Age enclosure [HER reference: TQ 40 SW51 – ES1783].

- The Island (southern end) – Roman hoard of 28 coins (Gallienus to Probus) found in 1920 [HER reference: TQ 40 SW31 – ES1792].

- West of St Michael's church – 3<sup>rd</sup>-century Roman hoard of 73 coins (Gallienus to Tetricus the younger), though there is some confusion as to whether this hoard was discovered near the Newhaven Fort [HER reference: TQ 40 SW34 – ES1795].

Outside, but near, the EUS study area Romano-British finds comprise:

- Near Castle Hill – Iron Age and Roman coins, Roman pottery and a fragment of a bronze armlet were found near Newhaven Fort in 1939, indicative of a settlement site [HER reference: TQ 40 SW3 – ES1786].

- The Rose Walk (environs) – Roman building, possibly a villa, discovered in mid 19th century, now built over [HER reference: TQ 40 SW32 – ES1793].

#### **2.4.3 Anglo-Saxon**

A few sherds (one or four, depending on the account) of Anglo-Saxon pottery were discovered at Newhaven Fort in 1970 [HER reference: TQ 40 SW51 – ES1783], and two or three doubtfully Anglo-Saxon sherds were produced in the South Way excavation.<sup>22</sup>

#### **2.4.4 Implications of pre-urban archaeology**

Given that there has been only one archaeological excavation within the EUS study area, the archaeology of the area before the known existence of a medieval village is considerable, and ranges from the Palaeolithic to the Roman period. Features and finds of these periods should be anticipated in any archaeological excavation in the vicinity. Moreover, although Anglo-Saxon pottery is scarce in the archaeological record in this area, the one excavation produced no evidence of medieval occupation (i.e. the medieval village was located elsewhere) and, thus, there remains a possibility of recovering evidence for the origins of the medieval settlement, known to have existed by the late 11<sup>th</sup> century.