

# Peacehaven

## Historic Character Assessment Report

November 2004



Sussex Extensive Urban Survey (EUS)

*Roland B Harris*



# Peacehaven

## Historic Character Assessment Report

November 2004

*Roland B Harris*

## Sussex Extensive Urban Survey (EUS)

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.

First edition: November 2004.

Copyright © East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, and Brighton and Hove City Council 2004

Contact:

*For West Sussex towns:*

01243 642119 (West Sussex County Council)

*For East Sussex towns and Brighton & Hove:*

01273 481608 (East Sussex County Council)

The Ordnance Survey map data included within this report is provided by East Sussex County Council under licence from the Ordnance Survey. Licence LA 076600 2004.

The geological map data included within this report is reproduced from the British Geological Map data at the original scale of 1:50,000. Licence 2003/070 British Geological Survey. NERC. All rights reserved.

*The views in this technical report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of English Heritage, East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, Brighton & Hove City Council, or the authorities participating in the Character of West Sussex Partnership Programme.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author wishes to acknowledge the advice, assistance, and support of Bob Connell, John Mills, Mark Taylor, Peter Ross, Keith Watson and Mike Hicks (West Sussex County Council); Dr Andrew Woodcock and Greg Chuter (East Sussex County Council); Graham Fairclough (English Heritage); and staff at the county records offices, English Heritage, and the library of the Sussex Archaeological Society.

*Cover photo: The Meridian monument and cliff-top at Peacehaven.*

## Contents

List of maps, tables and other illustrations	6
1 INTRODUCTION	7
2 SETTING	10
3 HISTORY, BUILDINGS & TOPOGRAPHY	13
4 STATEMENT OF HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER	17
5 HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH FRAMEWORK	22
6 NOTES	23

## List of maps, tables and other illustrations

Fig. 1. Location of Peacehaven within Sussex.

Fig. 2. Peacehaven from Telscombe Tye.

Fig. 3. The cliffs and sea defences at Peacehaven.

Fig. 4. Remains of gravel pit near the cliff at The Dell.

Fig. 5. Pylon on the north side of South Coast Road marking the eastern extent of Peacehaven (1916).

Fig. 6. Pre-war bungalow at 16 Southdown Avenue.

Fig. 7. Kenya House, 232 South Coast Road.

Fig. 8. Former Roman Catholic church of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady.

Fig. 9. The Dewdrop Inn (1924, converted to pub c.1928).

Fig. 10. Malines Avenue. Post-war made up roads and pavements, and redeveloped housing.

Fig. 11. Pre-war Meridian Lodge, on the corner of South Coast Road and Seaview Avenue.

Table 1. Sussex EUS Historic Character Types

Table 2. Sussex EUS chronology

Table 3. Summary of assessment of Historic Urban Character Areas (HUCAs) for Peacehaven

Map 1. Extent of Peacehaven EUS study area

Map 2. Solid and drift geology with 10m contours

Map 3. Ordnance Survey Epoch 4 Series 25"

Map 4. Historic Character Types (2004)

Map 5. Historic Character Type areas showing principal period from which present character is derived

Map 6. Historic Urban Character Areas (HUCAs)

Map 7. Historic Environment Value (HEV)

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background to the project

This report is an archaeological, historical, and historic urban character assessment of Peacehaven. 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* (HER) 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, buildings and topography

The history of Peacehaven in this report can be a brief summary only. It aims to synthesize the very limited 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 and physical development – that are most closely related to the urban historic environment today.

#### 1.4.3 Statement of Historic Urban Character

Whereas the section on history, buildings and topography (above) explores the development of Peacehaven 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

#### 1.5.1 History

Peacehaven has attracted considerable attention, but this has focused on its role as the *bête noir* of uncontrolled coastal development before the Second World War. 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.

Whilst lacking an authoritative study such as those undertaken for much of the county in the more recent volumes of the *Victoria County History*, Peacehaven has stimulated sporadic research. Much of this has been the work of resident enthusiasts, as a counterblast against opprobrium and to tell story of the plotlanders themselves. Given that the interest of Peacehaven lies in its particular variant of pre-1939 plotlands, marked by its very public and controversial nature, the most valuable study has been that of **Dennis Hardy** and **Colin Ward** in which the town is considered in a comprehensive series of studies of makeshift settlements at this time.

#### 1.5.2 Archaeology

There have been no archaeological excavations in Peacehaven, but the **East Sussex Historic Environment Record** (HER) database has been invaluable for providing the pre-urban archaeological context as evidenced by numerous archaeological finds.

#### 1.5.3 Historic buildings

Peacehaven has only one building that pre-dates the foundation of the town, for which English Heritage's statutory list of historic buildings has been utilized. Very limited fieldwork only was possible during this assessment and focused on identifying surviving examples of pre-1939 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 have proved invaluable, especially as these have been used in digital form, allowing overlaying with each other and with other data. Vertical air photography from 2000 provides a useful recent 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 Peacehaven covers the full extent of the town as set out and as far north as Telscombe Road. It excludes adjacent settlements at Telscombe Cliffs and Peacehaven Heights.

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

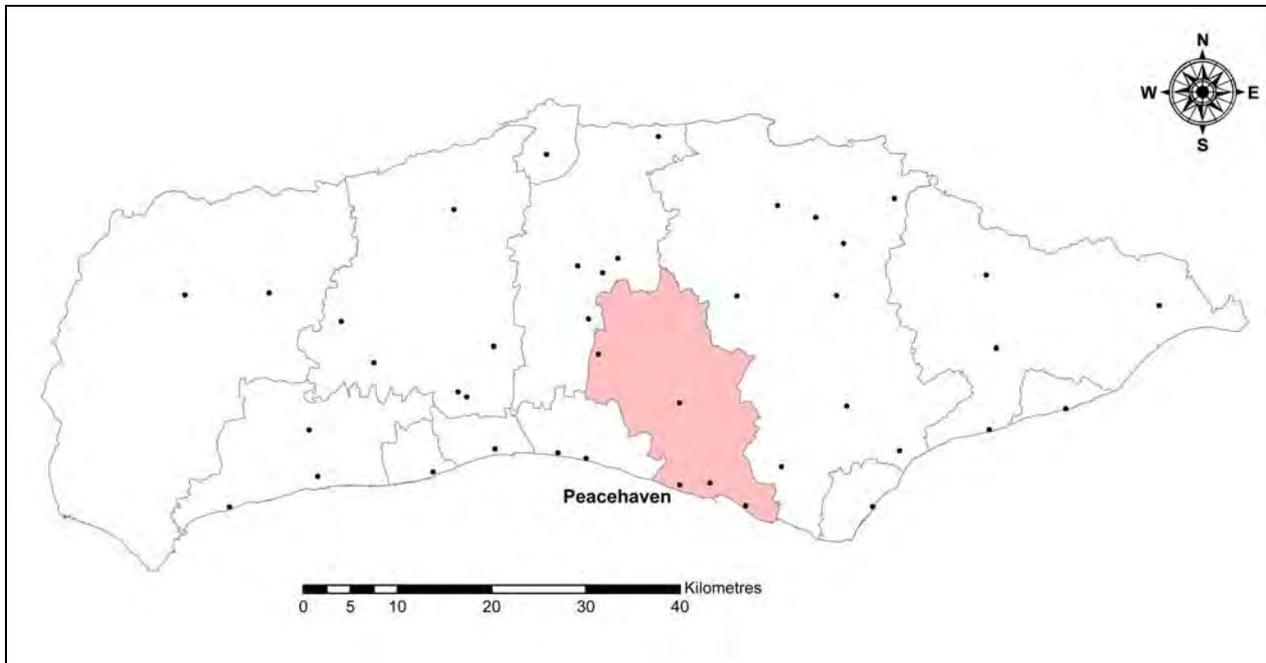


Fig. 1. Location of Peacehaven within Sussex. Lewes District is highlighted and points locate the 41 Sussex EUS towns.

## 2 THE SETTING



Fig. 2. Peacehaven from Telscombe Tye.

### 2.1 Topography (Map 2)

Peacehaven is located on the cliff top, where the southern (dip) slope of the South Downs is eroded by the English Channel. There is a gentle seaward slope across the town from c.60.0m OSBM at the east end of Telscombe Road, to 25.9m OSBM at the southern end of Steyning Avenue.

Off-shore contours measured by bathymetric survey are steeply sloped in the Peacehaven area and not likely to be a product of erosion. This suggests that, despite the rapidity of recent cliff erosion (section 2.2.1), the prehistoric coast was within 1km of that today.<sup>3</sup>

The settlement has been established north and south of the pre-existing and slightly sinuous South Coast Road from Newhaven to Brighton (A259). Until the development of the Meridian Centre to the north in 1979, nearly all commercial activity was concentrated on this road. To the west of the regular grid of the planned town (and outside the EUS study area), Telscombe Cliffs is an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century planned development that was initially less successful than Peacehaven and which ultimately became part of Peacehaven's expansion. Similar expansion beyond the early planned town is found to the north of Peacehaven

The town occupies the greater part of Peacehaven Civil Parish, created out of the southern part of Piddinghoe parish in 1929.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.2 Geology (Map 2)

#### 2.2.1 Solid geology

Along with the whole of Sussex, the rocks of the Peacehaven area are sedimentary. The town lies at the southern (cliff) edge of 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 much of the northern part of the town, however, is the sandstone and mudstone (commonly clay) of the Lambeth Group, being Tertiary (Palaeocene) irregular beds laid down on the eroded chalk.



Fig. 3. The cliffs and sea defences at Peacehaven, with the chalk shoreface ramp in the foreground.

The chalk cliffs at Peacehaven are near vertical and recently were retreating at 0.46m per year, although concrete sea defences and the

trimming back of the cliff face have reduced this.<sup>5</sup> Below the cliffs a visible shore platform (or shoreface ramp) of gently sloping chalk extends 100-150m into the sea.

### **2.2.2 Drift Geology**

The drift geology of the Peacehaven area is confined to dry valley deposits of sand and gravels, and clay-with-flints. The distinctive dry valleys of the downs are largely a product of periglacial erosion, while the clay-with-flints is a capping of reworked Palaeogene deposits.<sup>6</sup> It is only the latter that occurs within the EUS study area, with a small area of clay-with-flints at the southern end of Hoddern Avenue and Rowe Avenue.

## **2.3 Communications**

### **2.3.1 Water**

Although directly on the coast, the cliff-top location of Peacehaven and its creation in a period dominated by rail and road transport has meant that water communications have played no significant part in its history.

### **2.3.2 Road**

Peacehaven lies on the A259 (the main Newhaven-Brighton road). The road was turnpiked in 1824 (with a toll gate between later Cornwall Avenue and Seaview Road),<sup>7</sup> but remained unfenced across open downland in 1875. The road was disturnpiked in 1881.<sup>8</sup>

### **2.3.3 Railway**

Peacehaven never gained a railway, with the nearest connection at Newhaven (2.7km), where the London Brighton and South Coast Railway (LBSCR) had built a line in 1847 to Lewes, thence to London.<sup>9</sup>

## **2.4 Evidence for pre-urban activity**

### **2.4.1 Prehistoric**

There have been no archaeological excavations or evaluations, but there have been numerous prehistoric finds within the EUS study area.

- Lower Hoddern – two Lower Palaeolithic (500000 BC to 150001 BC) axes found during the Second World War [HER reference: TQ 40 SW48 – ES1827]
- Steyning Avenue – Lower Palaeolithic flint axe found at an unspecified location on the east side

of the road in 1959 [HER reference: TQ 40 SW49 – ES1828].

- Peacehaven (precise location unrecorded) – flint flake tool of possibly Palaeolithic date, found in 1949 [HER reference: TQ 40 SW46 – ES1826].
- Heathy Brow/Chatsworth Park/Courtlands – Mesolithic (10000 BC to 4001 BC) flint-working site represented by five areas on the higher northern ground of Peacehaven investigated in 1923. Finds include cores, scrapers, hollow scrapers, blades, points, wedges, hammer stones, fabricators, cooking stones and polished axes, with one site alone producing 8-10,000 flakes and cores [HER reference: TQ 40 SW22 – ES1830].
- The Oval – Neolithic (4000 BC to 2351 BC) flint hoe found on the field surface in the 19th century [SME reference: TQ 40 SW17 – ES1847].
- The Oval – three probable Bronze Age (2350 BC to 701 BC) barrows, marked on OS 1<sup>st</sup> Edition 1813, falling on the perimeter of The Oval, but no visible remains [HER reference: TQ 40 SW27 – ES1853].
- 26 Friars Avenue – probable Bronze Age bowl barrow, 27.0m in diameter and 1.3m in height, severely mutilated during the construction of Friars Avenue and no remains now visible [HER reference: TQ 40 SW19 – ES1849].
- Mount Caburn Crescent – probable Bronze Age barrow, marked on OS 1<sup>st</sup> Edition 1813, falling on the boundary of Mount Caburn Crescent and Epinay Park, but no visible remains [HER reference: TQ 40 SW21 – ES1851].
- Telscombe Road – Early Bronze Age perforated and double-ended quartzite pebble macehead found during excavation of footings for bungalow in 1924 [HER reference: TQ 40 SW35 – ES1832].
- Phyllis Avenue – Early Bronze Age barbed and tanged flint arrowhead probably found at 16 Phyllis Avenue [HER reference: TQ 40 SW50 – ES1829].

### **2.4.2 Romano-British**

- Glynn Road – Romano-British cremation urn (containing charred bones) and cooking pot found during digging of a trench in 1923. Dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. A Roman tile over the broken neck of a jar was found 90m to the south in the same year [HER reference: TQ 40 SW26 – ES1852].

Just to the east of the EUS study area, at Peacehaven Heights, repairs to the A259 revealed evidence of a Romano-British occupation site [HER reference: TQ 40 SW69 – ES1833].

### 2.4.3 Anglo-Saxon and medieval

No excavations or finds have produced evidence of Anglo-Saxon or medieval activity in or near the EUS study area.

### 2.4.4 Post-medieval

Although the area was open chalk downland at the time that it was acquired for the building of Peacehaven, there is evidence of pre-urban post-medieval activity:

- Sheep pens – between Capel Avenue and Keymer Avenue (1875); and on Heathy Brow (1875 until c.1920), from which the associated shepherd's hut survives in the garden of 7 The Compts, off Stanley Road.
- Lower Hoddern – first shown as a rectangular enclosure on the Ordnance Survey surveyors' draft of 1789 and 1805-6, and as a small farmstead from 1875 onwards until demolished in the mid 20<sup>th</sup>-century (now under the playing fields of Peacehaven Community School).
- Upper Hoddern – first shown as a small farmstead, or small holding, on the 1<sup>st</sup> series 25" Ordnance Survey map (c.1875), surviving the building of Peacehaven until demolished post-1945 and now under the playing fields of the youth centre.
- Hoddern toll gate – built to serve the turnpike road of 1824, located between Cornwall Avenue and Seaview Road, ceased functioning as toll gate in 1881 and was demolished in 1936.
- Chalk and gravel pits – numerous small chalk and gravel pits are shown in the area between the Newhaven-Brighton road and the cliffs from the Ordnance Survey surveyors' draft of 1789 and 1805-6 onwards. Several survived the building of Peacehaven (including that next to Peacehaven Hotel), but only that at the Dell recreation ground remains today.

A stade at Mooredale was recorded in the pre-Armada survey of the coast of Sussex in 1587, but this appears to be coincident with later Bearhide Gap, and thus lies west of the EUS study area.<sup>10</sup>



Fig. 4. Remains of gravel pit near the cliff at The Dell.

### 2.4.5 Implications of pre-urban archaeology

Although the greatest number of pre-urban finds from Peacehaven were recovered during the early years of the town, when buildings and roads were created on agricultural land, the implications are clear: considerable evidence for Romano-British, and, especially, earlier occupation of the EUS study area has been found and features and finds of these periods should be anticipated in any archaeological excavation in the area.