

= Hengistbury Head =

Hengistbury Head / ˈhɛŋstbri / is a headland jutting into the English Channel between Bournemouth and Mudeford in the English county of Dorset . It is a site of international importance in terms of its archaeology and is scheduled as an Ancient Monument . Declared a Local Nature Reserve in 1990 , the head and its surroundings form part of the Christchurch Harbour Site of Special Scientific Interest . It is also a Special Area of Conservation , Special Protection Area , an Environmentally Sensitive Area and a Site of Nature Conservation Interest . The name " Hengistbury Head " refers to the immediate area ; the elevated portion is called Warren Hill .

There has been human activity on the site since the Upper Palaeolithic ; during the Victorian era , it was heavily quarried , and in recent years tourism has become significant ? it receives over a million visitors annually . The various habitats on the Head provide a home for many plants , birds and insects , some of them rare and critically endangered . Erosion remains a threat to the site , although long @-@ term projects are intended to secure it for the future .

= = Location = =

Hengistbury Head is a sandstone headland forming part of Southbourne , which is a suburb of the town of Bournemouth to the west ; the nearest major settlement is Christchurch to the north . It is the most easterly part of the Borough of Bournemouth , and marks the most easterly point of Poole Bay . Historically part of Hampshire , the Local Government Act 1972 designated the area a part of Dorset . The northern slope of the hill tailing off towards the sea forms Mudeford spit , the sand bar closing Christchurch Harbour from the south .

= = Buildings = =

The spit is home to more 300 privately owned beach @-@ huts which are some of the UK 's most expensive . In 2015 five of the huts were put on the market for a combined asking price of £ 1 million . On average the huts measure around five by three metres , have no running water , and the occupants may only stay overnight from March to October . Despite the relative lack of amenities , the area has become one of the UK 's most desirable ; huts are rented out for up to £ 600 a week .

The Black House , a local landmark , stands at the end of the spit , opposite Mudeford Quay , site of the Battle of Mudeford in 1784 . Built in 1848 , it was once a boat @-@ builders ' house , but is now rented out to holidaymakers . It has served a variety of functions over the years , and is commonly associated with the area 's smuggling past .

= = Toponymy = =

Mentioned as Hedesburia in a church deed of the early 12th century , and referred to as Hynesbury Head in the 17th , Hengistbury only took on its current spelling in the 19th century , during a period of what archaeologist Barry Cunliffe calls " antiquarian romanticism " . Many prehistoric sites around this time were renamed to link them with historical figures . It was thought at the time that the legendary Anglo @-@ Saxon leader Hengist could be buried here , as he was said to have been laid to rest in an unlocated mound . Twentieth @-@ century excavations have established that the tumuli at Hengistbury Head date to the Bronze Age however .

= = History = =

Hengistbury Head is home to a plethora of nationally and internationally significant archaeological sites , with features dating from the Late Upper Palaeolithic to the Roman settlement of Britain , earning the site Scheduled Ancient Monument status . Interest in the site declined throughout the Dark Ages , until extensive development took place in Christchurch around 890 AD , when the Head may have been used as a lookout post . The area was heavily quarried during the Victorian period

and nowadays receives over a million visitors annually .

### = = = Stone Age = = =

Several archaeological digs have revealed that the site was occupied during the Upper Palaeolithic . There is evidence of an open settlement of the Creswellian culture on the hill in the middle of the headland dating to around 14 @, @ 100 years ago . With over 13 @, @ 000 lithic artefacts it is probably the largest site of the period . Most interesting were several blades typically found at Upper Paleolithic sites across Europe , but rarely seen outside of caves in the UK , where open air sites of this age are extremely rare . People at the Head were heavily involved with the production of blades , further excavations identified 649 tools , dominated by backed blades , endscrapers and burins .

At the time the Warren Hill would have overlooked a large river valley that was to become the English Channel . Once the sea had inundated the surrounding valley , Mesolithic hunter gatherers exploited the site . Pollen analysis of peat from the Solent bed suggest a lightly wooded headland free of close @-@ knit undergrowth during this period , an ideal habitat for game .

### = = = Bronze Age = = =

In Bronze Age Britain this was an important seaport . Eleven Bronze Age Britain round barrows sit on the promontory with two more a little further inland . Eleven of the round barrows were excavated ; three by Bushe Fox in 1911 ? 12 and eight by Harold St George Gray in 1919 and 1922 . Two appear to be undisturbed . Numerous finds including Early Bronze Age axes and cremation urns were recovered from these tumuli , which have been consistently found to be between 3500 and 4000 years old .

One of the barrows ( south of where the thatched barn now stands ) contained a high status cremation of a woman of about twenty years in age , accompanied by an incense cup , a halberd @-@ style pendant made from amber and copper alloy , and two gold cones that would have covered buttons of an organic material . The burial @-@ goods recovered are similar to those of the Wessex culture , the Wilsford and Dorset Ridgeway series in particular . An urn from one of the barrows likely to have been made between 1700 and 1500 B.C. , has been identified as Trevisker ware , a type widely found throughout Devon and Cornwall which was transported east in lesser amounts , this find being one of the easternmost discovered .

### = = = Iron Age = = =

In Iron Age Britain around 700 BC , a settlement on the Head was established ; also around this time , the headland was cut off from the mainland by the construction of two banks and ditches called the Double Dykes , similar to those found at Maiden Castle . The earthworks consisted of an inner bank three metres high , with a ditch three and a half metres deep . An outer ditch six metres wide and two metres in depth is now obscured due to wind @-@ blown deposits of sand and a gradual silting process . These defences turned Hengistbury Head into a fortified settlement area which seems to have grown over succeeding centuries until it became an important port . The Iron Age port at Hengistbury Head forms a final site in a small chain of fortified earthworks , starting from Hambledon Hill , and also including Hod Hill , Spetisbury Rings , Buzbury Rings , Badbury Rings and Dudsbury Camp .

John Lavender of the local Red House Museum noted evidence of small iron @-@ ore smelting hearths on Warren Hill , while green vitreous slag has been also found on the Head . In his 1911 to 1912 excavations , Bushe @-@ Fox found evidence for working of lead , copper and silver ; two ingots discovered at this time revealed that raw materials would have been imported to the area . One ingot was of nearly pure copper , while the other , which weighed 8 @. @ 6 kg , was roughly 50 / 50 copper @-@ silver alloy with around one percent gold . Argentiferous ( i.e. silver @-@ bearing ) copper was refined to produce silver at the Head . There are also indications that gold was worked at Hengistbury . One excavation produced part of a torc , twisted together with a small gold bracelet

and another fragment in a manner suggesting it was scrap ; a different site produced a streaked touchstone indicating use in gold testing .

Thousands of bronze coins have been found from the pre @-@ Roman period , the vast majority having been struck by the Durotriges . The abundance of coins , together with various hearths and smelting artefacts found within a close proximity suggest that the Durotrigan finds were minted here .

= = = International trade centre = = =

The advanced level of metallurgy in the area , coupled with its ease of access from the Continent , meant that Hengistbury Head became a significant Late @-@ Iron Age port ; trading worked metal of iron , silver , and bronze in return for figs , glass , tools and other goods . Armorican coins and pottery uncovered here show links to the Brittany peninsula . Amphorae used for the transportation of North Italian wine have been found in such quantities ( more than all other sites in the south of England put together ) , that it is clear that the Head was a main port of entry into the country . However , no similar amphorae have been unearthed in Armorica , hinting at a more direct trade route between Hengistbury Head and Italy . Most of these vessels date from before 50 B.C. , while later styles are absent despite being common in other parts of Britain , indicating the wine trade seems to have declined at about the time Caesar began his Gaulish campaigns .

= = = Roman occupation to Medieval period = = =

After the Roman conquest , the south @-@ east of England started to develop into a more urban economy , while the socio @-@ economic system of the south @-@ west remained little changed . Hengistbury would still have served as an important hub for the Dumnonii of Cornwall and Devon , and the Durotriges of Wiltshire and Dorset ; since transport by water was more efficient at the time , and the Head offered both a coastal route , and freshwater options via the Stour and Avon rivers .

No evidence of Saxon use has been found at the Head . The area was not substantially reoccupied until Alfred the Great decided to rebuild the harbour as a defence against raiders . He built the town that later became Christchurch , on the north side of the harbour . Access to Salisbury up the River Avon made this a more strategic place . The Head may have been used for harbour defence at this time . In the 11th century , some of the iron @-@ ore rich stones found at the Head were used in the construction of Christchurch Castle . These reddish @-@ coloured stones can still be seen in the base of the now ruined castle .

= = = 17th , 18th and 19th centuries = = =

In the late 1600s , Andrew Yarranton ( with backing from the Earl of Clarendon ) commenced a scheme to improve the harbour . In 1693 a channel was cut out to sea , whilst ironstone boulders from the head were used to create a pier . The plans proved ineffective ; the pier was poorly positioned and subsequent storms ( including the Great Storm of 1703 ) soon undid most of the work although parts of the pier known as " Clarendon 's Jetty " or the " Long Rocks " are still visible today . Many tons may have been removed from the beach and the head itself to make the jetty .

In 1733 a new Excise and Customs Bill was introduced , restricting imports and raising taxes on many luxury items . Christchurch rapidly became a hot @-@ bed for smugglers , where they were known as " freetraders " , and much of the town was involved in the trade . The " Double Dykes " are said to have been used to hide contraband , while Mudeford spit is rumoured to have been used in the construction of " Guinea boats " ( cheaply built galleys sometimes capable of outrunning the day 's steamships ) . One apocryphal story is that the black house acquired its distinctive black colour when customs officers tried to smoke out some holed @-@ up smugglers by lighting fires around the base . The house was constructed in 1848 and used by shipwrights as a dwelling and workshop , smuggling was in decline with the introduction of a free trade policy and more effective measures being implemented by the Coast Guard by this time , so the house may not in fact have had much

involvement in smuggling . The spit has a long association with shipbuilding with two large ships being built in the mid 19th century , the Viscountess Canning of 193 tons and the Enterprise 253 tons .

From 1848 to 1872 , the Hengistbury Mining Company ? formed by a Christchurch @-@ based merchant , John E. Holloway ? extracted many more ironstone boulders through quarrying . Holloway brought coal from Southampton , and took the ironstone as ballast for the return journey . These boulders , known as Iron Doggers , were prized for their high quantity of iron ore ( up to 30 % ) . They form the base of Hengistbury Head , and the removal of a substantial amount of doggers over the years has weakened the headland . These and earlier excavations resulted in a loss of up to a third of the Head , caused mainly by erosion after the quarry 's closure . The silt being washed down also threatened the ecology of the saltmarsh below . This has been reduced by the building of a dam , in 1976 , to create a pool . Many " doggers " can still be seen lining the route of the land @-@ train and at the quarry .

= = = UK 's first airshow = = =

In 1910 the first international aviation meeting ever held in Britain took place on a specially laid out aerodrome consisting of a mile of grassland between the " Double Dykes " and the nearby village of Tuckton . About twenty pioneer aviators from around the world participated in various competitions including spot landing , altitude tests and speed trials ( both for the fastest and slowest circuit ) .

On the second day of the meeting , co @-@ founder of Rolls @-@ Royce and pioneer aviator Charles Rolls was thrown from his plane , which disintegrated beneath him . Despite the fact that the first @-@ ever powered flight had occurred only seven years previously , Rolls had been attempting a precision landing . He died from his injuries shortly after his fall . The event was Britain 's earliest fatal flying accident involving a powered aircraft .

= = = 20th century = = =

There were a number of development schemes for the head including a major railway and docks scheme proposed in 1885 , proposals for housing and a golf course were also put forward before World War I , though none of these schemes came to fruition . In 1919 the head was sold by Sir George Meyrick to Harry Gordon Selfridge with plans to construct a grand house . These plans also came to nothing , apart from the establishment of a nursery garden . Bournemouth Borough Council purchased the head in 1930 for £ 25 @, @ 200 ; although plans for housing existed west of double dykes , the head itself was to be kept as public open space . During World War II the head was closed to the public and was occupied by the army , becoming home to a number of installations including a radar station . The area was also extensively mined . The Head was finally cleared of the military defences by the 1950s .

= = Present day = =

Hengistbury Head Local Nature Reserve is currently owned and managed by Bournemouth Borough Council . In 1990 , the land was declared a Local Nature Reserve , as a commitment by the town of Bournemouth to conserve and enhance the environment . The heathland forms part of the Dorset Heaths and is internationally protected as a Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area . Nearby , the upper reaches of Christchurch Harbour ( including the meadows at Wick ) are recognised as an Environmentally Sensitive Area .

The head today is used for a variety of reasons . Firstly it is a tourist spot where country walks can be taken all over the head due to the well defined gravel paths , some of which form part of the Bournemouth Coast Path . In 2008 , many paths were resurfaced , making more ( though not all ) parts of the Head wheelchair accessible . For example , it is now possible to gain wheelchair access to Quarry Pool . Regular field trips to the site are made by students of all ages and there are occasional guided tours or meetings around the Head covering a wide variety of subjects .

There is a cafe at the bottom of the Head on the Bournemouth side . Hengistbury Head Outdoor Education centre is located near here on the south shore of the harbour . Run by Brockenhurst College , the centre offers a variety of water and outdoor activities . A scenic land train ( known as " the Noddy train " ) makes regular journeys from the cafe to the end of the spit , a journey of ten or so minutes . On the head itself is a H. M. Coastguard radio relay station , a nature reserve and a triangulation pillar , shown on Ordnance Survey maps as 36 metres above sea level . Ample parking ( subject to charges ) can be found near the cafe , but the Head is also within walking distance of Southbourne and parts of Christchurch .

The Quarry Pool is now a significant part of the nature reserve features of the Head . While it was very acidic in the early years , since 1990 it has allowed the growth of a significant number of plant and insect species , as well as mallard and little grebe . The insects provide valuable food for migrating sand martins and swallows .

== Visitor centre ==

A new visitor centre for Hengistbury Head was opened in December 2013 . The extant thatched barn was upgraded in an eco -friendly way and the new addition cost over a million pounds . Funds were provided by developer contributions , the Heritage Lottery Fund and £ 300 ,000 from landfill tax .

The centre houses a display area which documents the site 's archaeology , ecology and geology , while work space has been created for volunteers and other community groups such as the Hengistbury Head Supporters Group , Residents ' Association and Christchurch Harbour Ornithological Group . The public now have the chance to scrutinise a selection of the finds discovered at Hengistbury Head in the last century , and to interact with experienced staff , as well as providing them with the opportunity to become actively involved in the administration of the nature reserve .

The surrounding area has been extensively landscaped to create outdoor learning areas and a wildlife garden . Energy saving features include photovoltaic panels for electricity and ground source heat pump for heating . A green roof ( a living roof that is partially or completely covered with vegetation and a growing medium ) , is used to absorb rainfall and provide insulation . The centre is constructed using timber frame walls insulated with straw bales .

== Geography ==

According to Ian West of Southampton University , " Hengistbury Head is the best part of the Bournemouth coast for geology and geomorphology .... [ and ] is geologically important for the unusual nodules of sideritic ironstone [ found ] in Middle Eocene strata . " The exposed and relatively untouched cliff face at the Head perfectly lends itself to students of stratigraphy . Warren Hill itself is composed of Tertiary Bracklesham Beds , a mixture of clays and marls with overlying sandy and lignitic beds .

== Erosion ==

One serious threat to the future of the Head is erosion of the exposed southern cliff face from wind and rain , as well as erosion caused by the sea primarily through the process of Longshore drift . A comparison of Ordnance Survey maps reveals that 25 metres of cliff was washed away from 1915 to 1962 , a process accelerated by the Bournemouth cliff 's concreted promenade and groynes , construction of which started in the early 20th century . It is thought that in the last 200 years around 150 metres of land has been lost from the Head . The first attempt to counteract erosion came in the 1930s when Bournemouth Council constructed a breakwater now known as " the Long Groyne " . Since then , a gabion revetment has been constructed to secure the weakest point at the eastern end of the Head . In a long term project to secure the Head 's future , from 2005 to 2008 Poole Bay was replenished with 1 @ 8 million cubic metres of beach material , drawing in from some

surfers and beach lovers owing to the increase in sharp stones on Southbourne beach in particular . The project 's organizers , the Poole Bay Partnership , state that : " The resulting wide beaches have been a success in terms of their function as a coast protection structure and for the enjoyment they provide to the area 's residents and visitors . "

= = Flora and fauna = =

Hengistbury Head forms part of the Christchurch Harbour Site of Special Scientific Interest ( SSSI ) , and in May 1990 was declared a Local Nature Reserve . The Head supports 500 plant species ( a quarter of the national flora ) , including eight red data book species , 14 nationally scarce , and 39 locally rare species . The main nature reserve area faces Christchurch Harbour , and is contiguous with the reed beds of Wick Fields . The Head contains a large variety of habitats from the heathland on Warren Hill to freshwater ponds , sand dunes , and salt marshes . The woodland ( known as Withybed Wood ) is home to English oak and silver birch amongst many other trees , and is of particular interest , as it is the only such area to be shown on an 1811 Ordnance Survey map of the Bournemouth / Christchurch area . In 2002 , cattle @-@ grazing commenced in a field near the new visitor centre known as " Barn Field " . This , combined with gorse eradication , has assisted in the restoration of this habitat to its ancient character .

Present on the site is sea knotgrass ( *Polygonum maritimum* ) , the rarest of the knotgrasses in Britain , and currently listed as a " schedule 8 species " under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 . Such plants are afforded greater than usual protection against damaging activities ? such as " cutting , picking , destroying or selling . " The heathland is both a Special Area of Conservation and a Special Protection Area , part of a network of the best wildlife sites in Europe .

The various habitats provide homes to numerous species of insects . There are 700 moth species recorded in the nature reserve , again a quarter of the national total . At different spots across the site butterflies ( including the green hairstreak ) , damselflies ( like the large red ) , and dragonflies ( such as the hairy dragonfly ) can be observed . According to a 2005 report , the exceedingly rare thirteen @-@ spotted ladybird ( *Hippodamia 13 @-@ punctata* ) was recently observed at the Head , the first sighting in the UK since 1952 .

Over 300 bird species have been recorded in the area , making Hengistbury Head an important migratory point . The Balearic shearwater , considered critically endangered with extinction by the IUCN and seldom sighted in the UK , has been seen in the area . Other rare birds spotted here include the purple heron , the pink @-@ footed goose , the European honey buzzard and the melodious warbler . The fields and reserved areas near the car park provide an ideal spot to watch and listen to a significant population of skylarks during the summer months .

In 1989 a project commenced to re @-@ introduce the country 's rarest amphibian , the natterjack toad , to Hengistbury Head . The natterjack was last recorded on the headland in the 1950s before its extinction , probably as the result of a lack of suitable ponds . The project has been a great success and today there are thriving populations at various locations . The ideal time to witness their mating rituals is in May as dusk approaches , when the distinctive call of the natterjack can be heard for miles around .