

The Roman lighthouse (Pharos) adjacent to the Church of St. Mary in Castro, within the grounds of Dover Castle. The Pharos is the oldest surviving lighthouse in the world.





Introduction

Extracted from: *Light On The Forelands* by Ken & Clifford Trethewey, Jazz-Fusion Books (2022)

From Prehistory to the Romans

The Early History of Kent; Geography and geology of the Forelands; The arrival of the Romans and the creation of their portal into the British Isles; Conversion to Christianity; The problem of sand.

Prehistory

About 10,000 years ago the ice sheets of the Northern hemisphere slowly retreated to reveal the land beneath, the outline of which looked quite different from the shape on the maps of today.¹ The south-east corner of what is now England was just a small part of the great continent of Europe across which the earliest peoples were able to pass freely. Great changes were to come. Perhaps the biggest was when the balance between the height of the sea and the land changed enough to flood large swathes of land. Around 8,000 years ago, much of what is now the southern North Sea disappeared beneath the waves and perhaps the most far-reaching event was the breach of the land bridge at the Straits of Dover or the *Pas de Calais* as our friends from France call it. The English Channel (French: *Le Manche*) was created and local inhabitants were now able to claim the newly-formed islands to the west as their own. The separation from the continental land mass

led to the creation of the British identity and gave people new reasons to fall out with each other for millennia to come.

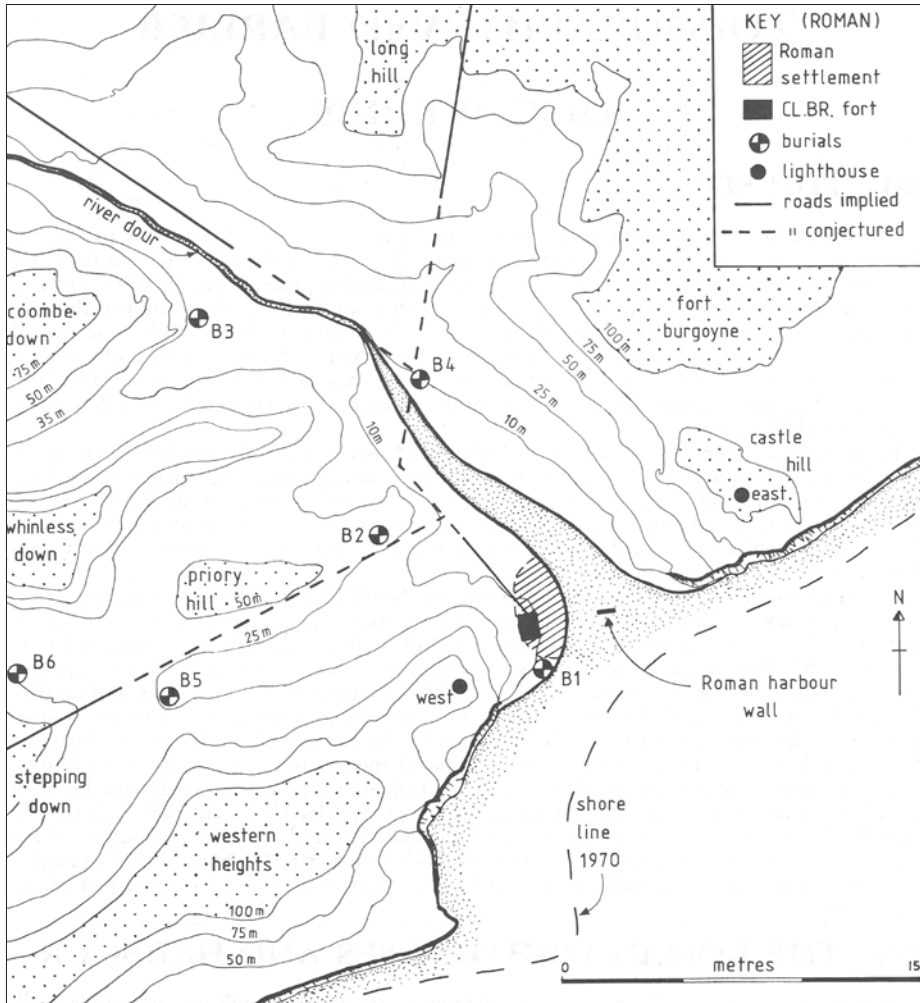
The distance between the island group and the continent was both short enough to allow continued access by those with the skills and determination to come in boats, but big enough to form a significant barrier to mass migration and - indeed - invasion, but there were plenty of others who made it across the water. English history recalls the Roman conquest whereby the invaders overcame the resident natives and occupied most of the largest island - Britannica - as far as the Scottish, Welsh and Cornish borders.

Portus Dubris and Thanet

It was hardly surprising that the Romans chose to cross the Channel at its narrowest point, and, having gained a foothold in Britannica, established lighthouses and communication towers at Boulogne (*Gesoriacum*) and Dover (*Portus Dubris*).² If there was

¹ van de Noort, Robert: *North Sea Archaeologies - A Maritime Biography, 10,000 BC - AD 1500*. Oxford University Press (2011), pp282. ISBN: 9780199657087.

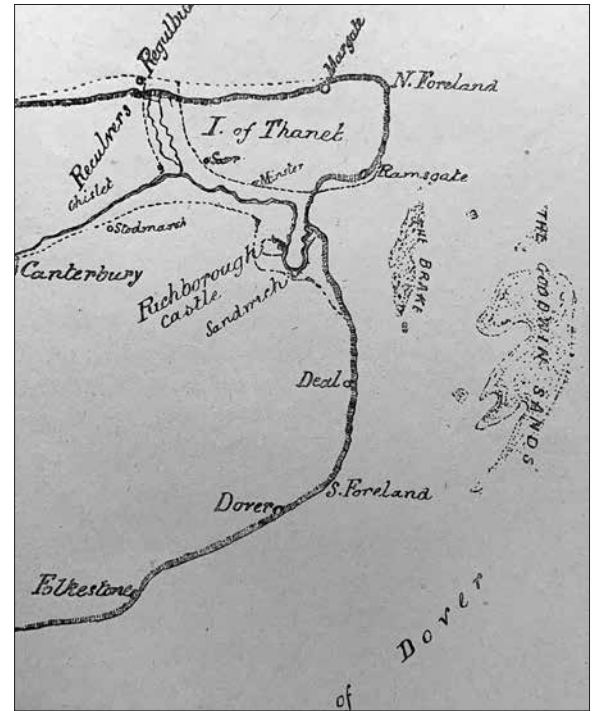
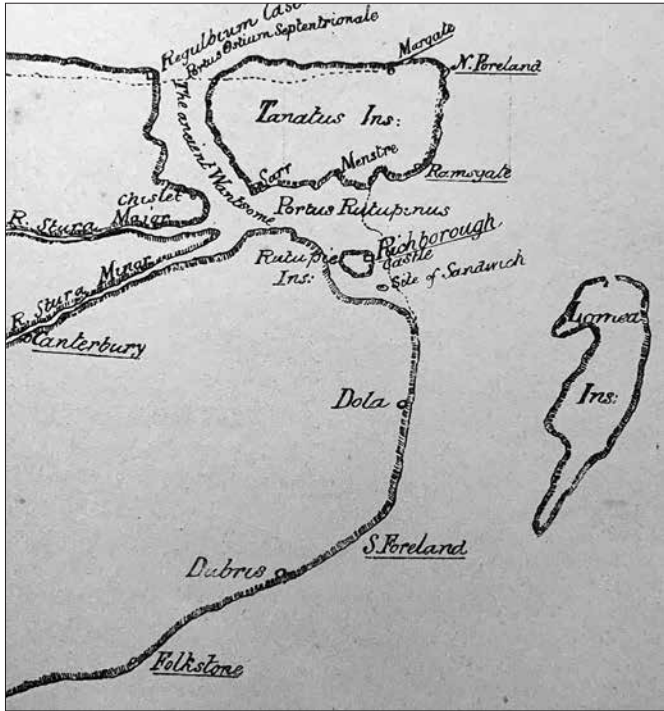
² Although the Romans did not invent lighthouses, they were the first to recognise their true value as aids to navigation. Ken Trethewey: *Ancient Lighthouses*, Jazz-Fusion Books (2018).



LEFT: A map of Dover, known to the Romans as Portus Dubris. The presence of the mouth of the river Dour presented a good site for landing and the first camp was established on the western bank. Two lighthouses were built on high ground to the east and west. Little remains of the western tower, but the eastern tower remains and is the oldest existing lighthouse tower in the world today. [Philp, Brian: The Excavation of the Roman Forts of the Classis Britannica at Dover 1970-1977. Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit, CIB Headquarters, Dover Castle, Kent (1981).]

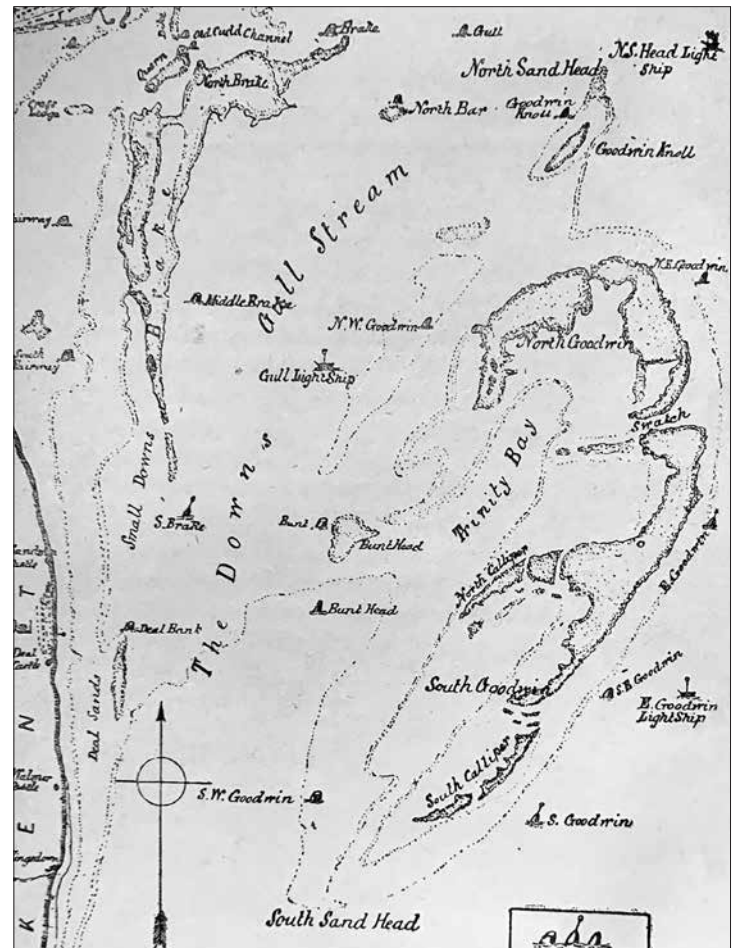
BELOW: A view from the site of the eastern lighthouse looking west. It shows the low elevation of Dover situated between two areas of high ground. The River Dour is now mostly hidden in a culvert.





Three sketch maps by the same author. [Gattie, G Byng: Memorials of the Goodwin Sands, J] Kelliher, London (1904)]
 ABOVE LEFT: A sketch map of the Roman Portus Rutupinas, showing Richborough where main port of entry into Roman Britain was located. Thanet is called Tanatus Insula. Also shown on the right is the island of Lomea that would, some ten centuries later, it is believed, become the Goodwin Sands.
 ABOVE RIGHT: A sketch map of the same area after the island of Lomea had been inundated.
 BELOW RIGHT: The Goodwin Sands at the start of the twentieth century, showing lightships and buoys. Note the two areas landward from the sandbanks, called the Downs and The Gull Stream, both areas of comparatively sheltered water.

ever any doubt about the importance of Dover as the main entry point to Britain its was removed by this time when the flow of marine traffic began to peak significantly. On a coastline dominated by great white cliffs, Dover had first been selected as the most convenient place to land because it was one of the relatively few sites along the coast with a suitable low-level access. However, once the Romans had explored more of the coastline by sailing north through waters sheltered by an offshore island, a decision was taken to move the main arrivals terminal to Richborough, itself an island at the entrance to a channel called Wantsum and a site now in the Isle of Thanet (*Tanatus Insula*), created by the Channel. Compared to Dover, Richborough was considered to have better navigable access and sheltered disembarkation points. From Richborough the route continued to the northern Kent coast at Reculver (*Reculbrium*) whence ships could sail up the river Thames to London (*Londinium*) (probably Shadwell close to the site of the Tower of London) or north to Colchester (*Camulodunum*) which became a local capital. In this way, eastern Kent became a valuable Roman asset as a portal providing access to much of the British Isles.



There is plenty of evidence for the use of the Wantsum Channel as an important waterway. It was often reported to be about half a mile wide in places and Twine records that it was in use by barques of significant size in the 16th century. The town of Sandwich was created by the Romans who used the waterfront sites in support of the activities at Richborough. Discoveries of ancient anchors and timber piers have been found at the small inland village of Sarre.³

After the Romans

With the building of the Roman pharos at Dover, still in existence today and the world's oldest surviving lighthouse, the Romans brought their own proven technology in the world of lighthouse construction to Britain. The benefits for seamen who used the lights from the pharos for their navigation must certainly have helped to solidify the philosophy of lighted aids to navigation. However, the expulsion of the Romans from Britain after 400 CE led to centuries of re-orientation that began with a conversion of its inhabitants from paganism to Christianity, a process recognised to have begun around the extremities of the British Isles, but which was facilitated by the founding of a religious centre by St. Augustine at Canterbury in 597 CE and its rebuilding as a major cathedral in the eleventh century.

The Christian ethic of loving thy neighbour led to the establishment of guilds, brotherhoods and fraternities – self-help groups of citizens – which resulted in the creation of formal bodies known as Trinity Houses in Dover, Hull, Newcastle upon Tyne, Leith and London. We shall see later how this resulted in the body that today oversees the management and maintenance of our lighthouses, but the use of lights to assist mariners at sea was developed out of the Christian ethic and was frequently associated with practitioners of that religion. We can be quite sure that lights were used at a number of strategic points around the coast of Kent from very early times at the start of the medieval period. Thus, the long centuries of the early middle ages were marked by the slow but steady introduction of Christianity into England, and because of its proximity to the continent the southeast corner of Kent played a big part. In a sense, it could be said that the long period of stability under the ethos of Roman Catholic Christianity began with the arrival of St. Augustine



ABOVE: An artist's impression of the two Roman lighthouses on the east and west sides of Dover. Almost no trace remains of the west Pharos in the foreground.

at Richborough in 596 CE and ended with the divorce from it initiated by Henry VIII in the mid-1530s. With their Kings and other leaders nominally signed up to Christianity, ordinary people took up a way of life that, in the broadest sense, complied with Christian ethics. Systems of government were set in place with the most literate and educated being drawn from the many religious communities that sprung up across the land. The most able church leaders took up high positions in the government, supported by networks of others administering the many religious houses which, themselves owned a large proportion of the lands that were not owned by the King or members of his court. Monasteries became woven into the fabric of medieval society as centres of worship, learning and charity. They had immense wealth and political influence and by controlling parish churches, almshouses, hospitals, farming estates and tenant villages across the entire British Islands, Britain became a Christian country.

At first it was the Augustinians who set the daily orders but later more religious groups thrived such as Cistercians, Benedictines and others. At the time of the Dissolution there were nearly 900 religious

³ Gattie, p20.



ABOVE: A memorial in Thanet to mark the arrival of St. Augustine into England at Richborough in 596 CE.

houses in England, around 260 for monks, 300 for regular canons, 142 nunneries and 183 friaries; some 12,000 people in total, 4,000 monks, 3,000 canons, 3,000 friars and 2,000 nuns. (It is usually considered that monks preferred a life of seclusion, whilst friars were outgoing evangelists who mixed amongst the community.) If the adult male population was 500,000, that meant that one adult man in fifty was in religious orders.⁴ The Dissolution was undoubtedly an event having some of the most profound consequences in British history.

We have already noted the great changes in sea levels that occurred after the Ice Age and these continued to occur until past the period of Classical history. It is hardly surprising that folklore contains references to the existence of at least one large island off the east Kent coast. The Romans referred to a place called *Infera Insula* (Low Island), but another name has been more frequently used - *Insula Lomea*.⁵ Today, there is fair reason to think that the Goodwin Sands are a remnant of the ancient island of Lomea. Permanently above high water in

Roman times, it was both a hazard and an occasional asset. With a great deal of Roman marine traffic passing around South Foreland using the ports of Dover and Richborough, bad weather would have frequently forced ships onto any available landing areas where shelter might be obtained and so what is now called the Goodwin Sands - extensive areas that are still exposed at low tides - were useful as havens to Romans and Anglo-Saxon mariners. Tradition has it that the island was inundated in medieval times - perhaps around the twelfth century, and this is consistent with our understanding of the changes to the waters in this shallow seaway.

An island that exists permanently above high water is far less of a hazard than one that appears and disappears with the tide, so since unrecorded times when the sea engulfed Lomea the Goodwin Sands have wreaked havoc with shipping. Even in recent centuries the constantly changing size, location and depth of the hazard has posed a great challenge to those wishing to mark its dangers. Whether by placing warning beacons on the shore in the form of lighthouses or by fixing buoys and light ships on the sandbanks themselves, the situation was always in flux. We shall shortly see some of the efforts made.

The Problem of Sand

Ever since Julius Caesar came, saw and went home, countless vessels of peace and war have used the narrow stretch of water and made it one of the world's busiest seaways. In the early ADs, the Roman emperor, Caligula, built a tower, probably containing a beacon, on each side of the Channel. On the English side, the tower was located at a spot now within the walls of Dover castle. The tower fell into disuse during the 'dark' ages. As the centuries passed and Britannica recovered, the recognition that lighthouses could be useful spread incrementally across the land.

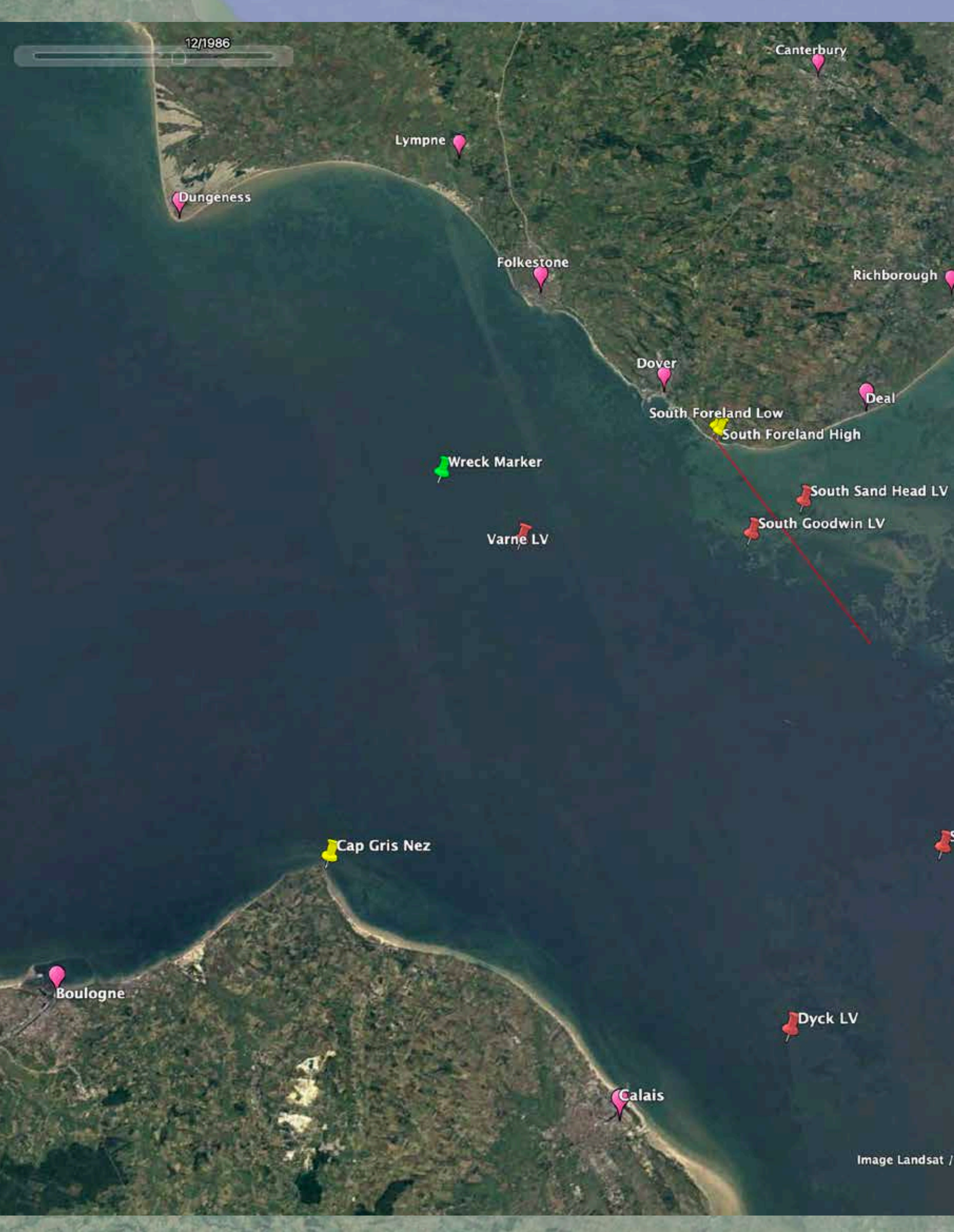
The white cliffs of Kent overlook a particularly dangerous stretch of water around our coasts. It is not the towering precipices of chalk, neither is it the reefs of rock or isolated inlets that form the enemy to shipping, but vast stretches of sand in almost continuous shoals and banks which stretch from the English Channel to the Humber.

Lights at North and South Foreland were amongst the earliest to be established in the British Isles and continued to attract much attention thereafter, providing as they did assistance to ships in what would become the busiest sea lane in the world.

⁴ Wikipedia: *Dissolution of the Monasteries*, Jan 2021.

⁵ John Twyne: *De Rebus Albionis*, London, 1590.

12/1986



Lympne

Canterbury

Dungeness

Folkestone

Richborough

Dover

South Foreland Low

Deal

South Foreland High

Wreck Marker

South Sand Head LV

Varne LV

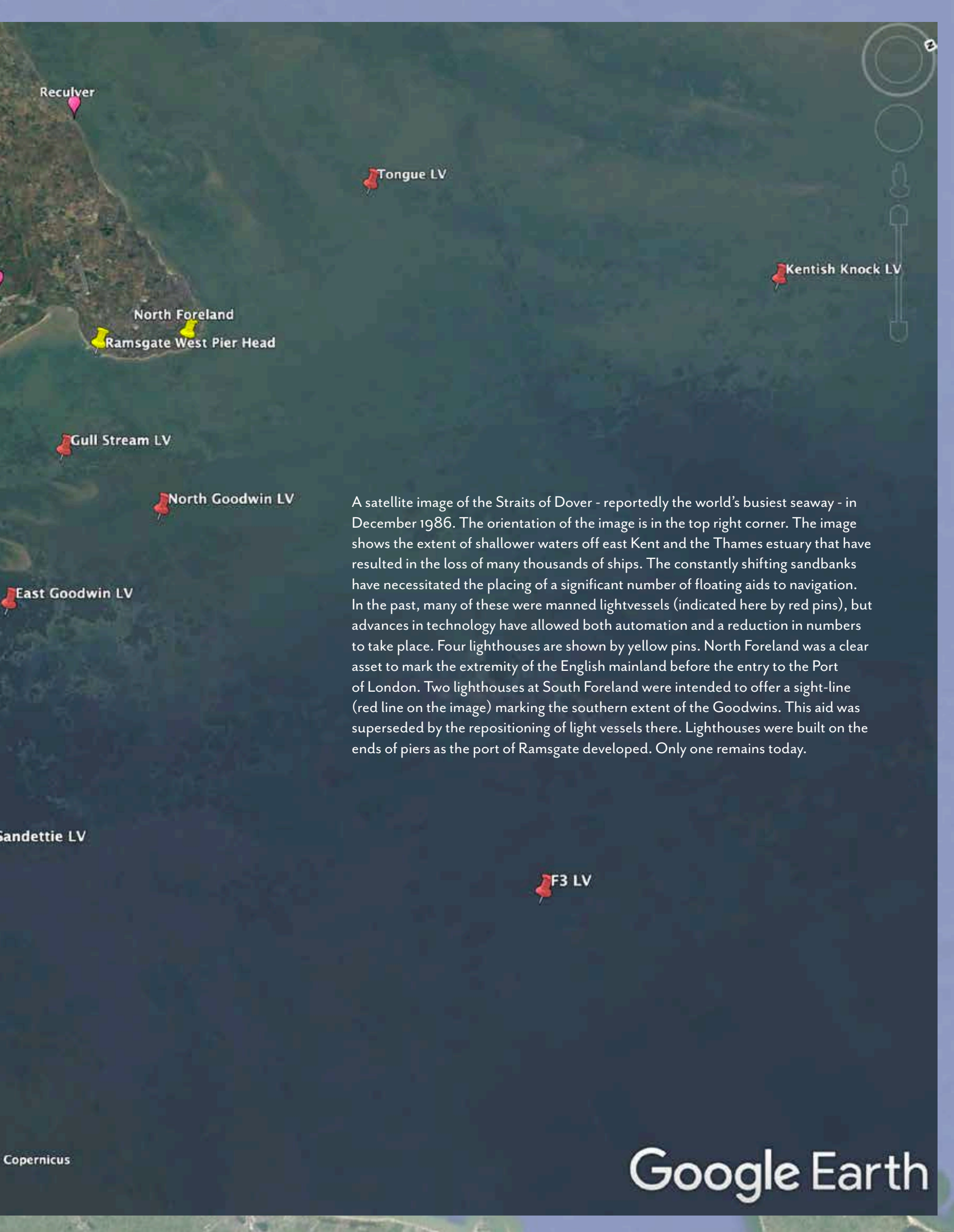
South Goodwin LV

Cap Gris Nez

Boulogne

Dyck LV

Calais



Reculver

Tongue LV

Kentish Knock LV

North Foreland

Ramsgate West Pier Head

Gull Stream LV

North Goodwin LV

East Goodwin LV

Sandettie LV

F3 LV

A satellite image of the Straits of Dover - reportedly the world's busiest seaway - in December 1986. The orientation of the image is in the top right corner. The image shows the extent of shallower waters off east Kent and the Thames estuary that have resulted in the loss of many thousands of ships. The constantly shifting sandbanks have necessitated the placing of a significant number of floating aids to navigation. In the past, many of these were manned lightvessels (indicated here by red pins), but advances in technology have allowed both automation and a reduction in numbers to take place. Four lighthouses are shown by yellow pins. North Foreland was a clear asset to mark the extremity of the English mainland before the entry to the Port of London. Two lighthouses at South Foreland were intended to offer a sight-line (red line on the image) marking the southern extent of the Goodwins. This aid was superseded by the repositioning of light vessels there. Lighthouses were built on the ends of piers as the port of Ramsgate developed. Only one remains today.

Lurking in the background however was a khaki beast that would cause great consternation, namely a great sandbank known as the Goodwin Sands. Once called the “ship swallow” sands that have claimed tons of shipping and the lives of many crewmen. One storm of 1836 saw the loss of thirty vessels alone.

Three miles offshore from St. Margaret’s Bay is the southern edge of the sandbanks that stretch northwards for about 10 miles - about six miles offshore at Deal and reaching eastwards as much as a further four miles - to a point opposite Ramsgate. At low tides, various parts of the sandbanks are uncovered, a situation that naturally changes from year to year for the sands may shift as a result of weather and sea conditions.

On the shore side of the Goodwin Sands, the deeper waters are more sheltered and have been used for centuries as anchorages. The land to the west offers protection from strong westerly gales, whilst the Sands can offer some respite from easterly forces, unless the tide is high when there have been many cases of damage to and loss of ships moored there. This area is known as the Downs, a name suggested as having been derived from *les Dunes* - the French translation of The Sands.⁶ Of special note is the loss of thirteen men-of-war from moorings in the Downs during the Great Storm of 1703 - the same event that caused the loss of the first Eddystone lighthouse and its architect, Henry Winstanley. Of the Goodwins, the Victorian author Davenport-Adams wrote:

“On the entire coast of England there is probably no other locality so fatally connected with dismal stories of human suffering, and yet it was long impossible to warn the sailor from it ... Lighthouses could not be stationed on its shifting sands.”⁷

Stanley Treanor, a priest who served for many years as Chaplain to the RNLI boats of Deal, Walmer and Kingsdown, and to the lightship men, made many trips in these waters in bad weather. On one occasion he was making a visit to the men on the East Goodwin light vessel.

“I shall never forget the sensation of striking bottom in one of those swatches⁸ where I expected to find ...

6 Treanor, T Stanley: *Heroes of the Goodwin Sands*, The Religious Tract Society, (1904) p13. This book gives excellent accounts - often first-hand - of numerous wrecks and rescues by the lifeboat crews of the east Kent coast.

7 Davenport-Adams, W H: *Lighthouses and Lightships*, Charles Scribner, New York (1870) p253.

8 A swatch is a navigable channel between sandbanks. In this case, only the most knowledgeable boatmen would use it.

a depth of six feet. The noise of broken water on each side of us, and the ominous grating thump of our boat’s keel against the Goodwins, while the stumps of lost vessels grinned close by, gave us a keen sense of real peril.”⁹

A descriptive - even intimate - account of the Goodwin Sands has been given by Carter¹⁰, a seaman who knew the sands well having served for 2½ years on the North Goodwin lightship stationed over North Sand Head - apparently called “Jamaica Land” by the smugglers of old Deal. Standing on the sand at low tide he wrote:

“All around were small deep holes or “swillies”, caused by the whirlpools racing over the sands, and filled with as much as six feet of clear, green water. Many were curiously and beautifully marked around the edges by the tide and the wind. Some were scalloped like cockle-shells, some fluted and marked with regular, wavy lines; others were as featureless as extinct volcano craters. Elsewhere deep gullies had formed, where the shifting sand had crept out in shapes, blurred and hideously suggestive of Gargantuan, blindly reaching paws. The place resembled a Lilliputian Sahara, with tiny dunes and miniature cliffs and deep holes with crumbling edges and quicksand bottoms.”¹¹

At the highest tides, there can be 4 m (12 ft) of water above the sands; at the lowest tides, the sands could rise 2 m (6 ft) above the sea. And all of it the legacy of times in the distant past when no water covered the sand at all and the island of Lomea stood proud on the landscape.

It is well known that the east coast of England is susceptible to periodic tidal surges: the Thames Barrier was built in 1984 to combat this dangerous event. For example, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that in 1014:

“... on St. Michael’s Eve [28 September] the swollen incoming tide swept far and wide through many places in this land; and it ran further inland than it had ever done before, and submerged many homesteads and drowned a countless number of human beings.”¹²

Similarly in 1099, another report of an inundation occurs:

“... at Martinmas the incoming tide rushed up so

9 Treanor, p16.

10 Carter, George Goldsmith: *The Goodwin Sands*, Constable, London (1953).

11 Carter, p3-4.

12 *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. G N Garmonsway, Dent, London (1953) reprinted 1978, p145.



ABOVE: A view from the Goodwin Sands which are exposed at low tides and have been the cause of thousands of shipwrecks in this busy sea corridor. The South Foreland lighthouse is visible on the cliff top, just left of centre.

*strongly and did so much damage that no-one remembered anything like it before.*¹³

The second event seems to have been much more significant, described in detail by the antiquarian and writer of the first history of an English County, William Lambarde (1536-1601). In his description of the history and geography of Kent¹⁴ he describes in detail the event (that coincided with the death of the King William Rufus in 1099) and how the inundation had a catastrophic effect on Flanders and the low countries, as well as many parts of England and Scotland along the coasts of the North Sea. In particular, he describes how land - now the site of the Goodwin Sands - had once been part of the estate of Earl Godwin (d.1053) - the powerful Earl of Wessex under Canute. The inundation of 1099, he said, caused the Goodwins:

“... being sometime maineland ... was then first violently overwhelmed with light sand, wherewith it not onlie remaineth covered ever since, but it is become withal a most dreadful gulfe and shippe swalower, sometime passable by foote, and sometime laide under water so that it may bee said either sea, or land, or neither or both.”

This was more than a temporary tidal surge - a rare event indeed, for there is a clear indication that land that had once been permanently above water was now not, and by the 16th century, the sands of Godwin had become known as the “Ship Swallower.”

In the mid-20th century, it became common for historians, living in the new age of technology and science, to pooh-pooh such accounts as mere folk lore, subject to exaggeration. However, centuries

later, there was already evidence obtained by local experts who dug down to examine the strata of the ground in numerous places that:

“If we dig a well in many parts of the marsh the first soil gives place to a confused mess of marine substances, flints and fossils hurled indiscriminately together as if by a sudden bursting in of the sea in all its fury.”¹⁵

Similar evidence had also been found in the histories of the low countries.

The Conundrum of Sea Levels

Martin published a well considered work in 1838 which for its time expressed remarkable insight into the geology and tidal effects on the south east coast of Kent.¹⁵ He pointed out the apparent contradiction between a rise in sea level that caused Lomea to be permanently inundated, and an apparent fall in sea level which resulted in the loss of the Wantsum channel bounding the Isle of Thanet. How could an apparent rise in sea level take place at one point and an apparent fall occur at another point barely 10 miles distant?

Using his own observations made over 50 years of living in the area, he pointed out how the white cliffs of Folkestone and Ramsgate were being eroded, whilst those at Dover were seemingly much more permanent. Martin discussed with good clarity how changes to the rock and soil formations were much more likely than changes in sea level. The loss of the Wantsum channel he concluded was due to a filling-in or deposition process which, once the channel

13 *ibid*, p235.

14 Lambarde, William: *A Perambulation of Kent* (1576).

15 Martin K B: *Oral Traditions of the Cinque Ports*, Hunt & Co, London, 2nd edn. (1850).



ABOVE: Captain Bullock's Safety Beacon, erected on the Goodwin Sands in 1840.

had been blocked, diverted the tides towards the white cliffs around the coast of North Foreland, causing much more damage than had occurred when the channel was open and the energy of the currents could be dissipated within it.

Martin's theory was very much about changes to the coastline caused by the power of the tides which were quite capable of moving great quantities of solids around the coastline, causing irrevocable change and in some cases loss of permanent land. A very good example of this occurred at Spurn point in Yorkshire in 2013 when a significant portion of what was a peninsula was permanently swept away leaving the area of the point itself cut off at high tide.

Modern geological measurements tell us that the land can rise as well as the sea.¹⁶ Released from the pressure caused by billions of tons of ice over the past ten thousand years, the depressed land has been springing back and continues to gain height compared to the sea even today. Science informs us that the balance between the heights of the land and the sea is far more complicated than we ever imagined.

The First Aids to Navigation

Once the Wantsum Channel that joined Richborough to Reculver and made an island out of Thanet had silted up, ships were required to

pass around North Foreland instead of by-passing it. The strategic importance of North Foreland increased significantly and it, together with its sister location at South Foreland became strongly linked as places requiring good lights for the assistance of sailors. We shall see at various points throughout this book that the history of North and South Forelands are often linked through ownership and shared purpose. Thus, the building of lighthouses upon the North and South Forelands can be ascribed to the need to mitigate the losses occurring on the Goodwin Sands, but it is easy to identify other benefits.

We are certain that lighthouses were built here at least by 1636, and the fact that they were part of the same plans indicates their joint purpose. Efforts were also made to attach beacons to the sandbanks themselves, but this was obviously a much more difficult enterprise. Even the mooring of a ship bearing a warning light was not achieved until more than 150 years after the lighthouses ashore. Eventually, five different light vessels were set in place to assist ships operating in these dangerous waters.

The first detailed survey of the waters was made in the mid-18th century by a master mariner called Greenville Collins and his charts show the extent of the difficulties faced by ships before proper marks could be installed on site.

The problems presented by the changes to the sandy shoals and knolls resulted in the development

¹⁶ Dawson, Alastair: *Introducing Sea Level Change*, Dunedin, (2019), 92pp. ISBN 978-1-780460-87-1.

of a whole new technology whereby bespoke ships carrying lights were permanently moored in the dangerous spots where it was impossible to construct a permanent lighthouse. It appears that John Smeaton had surveyed the Goodwin Sands in 1789 during one of many visits to Ramsgate in his role as consultant engineer to the port¹⁷, an event that seems to have been overlooked in the authoritative work by Skempton.¹⁸ Smeaton concluded that a lighthouse was not a practical proposition on foundations such as these. A “very ingenious constructor” called Admiral Bullock attempted a built structure on the sand in 1840. He had been encouraged by a report from Trinity House who had also surveyed the Sands in 1817 and found that beneath the sand lay a stratum of chalk, just like the material of the white cliffs. Perhaps it was possible to find a firm foundation after all? Debate continued throughout much of the first half of the 19th century as to the geology of the site and why ships might be engulfed, as in quicksand, whilst there were clearly many sites where the sand so extremely hard as to break tools used to bore into it. Gattie describes in detail the substance of the debate and the controversies that occurred, all of which swung the arguments in favour of doubt about the sensibility of a lighthouse as opposed to the wisdom of using a light vessel.

As to lights shown from a ship moored on site, even in the comparatively benign waters of the southern North Sea, the maintenance of lights in their permanent positions aboard light vessels proved to be a difficult undertaking even at the best of times. Nevertheless, the task was undertaken and became a tale of significant success.

Until 1904 there were two lighthouses showing lights from the South Foreland, from which year the low lighthouse was taken out of service. Together, the two lights gave mariners a transit line past the southern edge of the great sandbank, but this was just part of the work that had been expended to mark the sands. Once the best methods had been tried and tested, lightships became the preferred option.

The North Goodwin light vessel was the first to be moored in place in 1798, at first called simply the Goodwin light vessel. A second ship called the Gull was placed in 1809 to mark the channel known as the Gull Stream on the inside of the sandbank. This was important for ships heading to Deal, Sandwich

and Ramsgate. Later, other light vessels were added: on South Goodwin (1832) and the East Goodwin (1874). There were many other aids to navigation set in place from time to time, and more details of the navigational history are given elsewhere in this book.

The Goodwin Sands in Culture

Since the early 19th century it has become a curious ritual to play cricket matches on the Goodwin Sands. Gattie records numerous occasions when matches have taken place.¹⁹ The first was in the summer of 1824 when a group of enthusiasts headed for the sands in the company of the Ramsgate harbour master, presumably acting as guide for their safety. All proceeded well on this occasion. However, as so often happens, less prepared individuals can overlook the dangers of their adventures and in 1839 or 1840 a second group tried to repeat the event using a small boat skippered by an experienced old hand from Deal. It is reported that after the match they were so intent on enjoying the contents of their refreshment hampers that they ignored the warnings of their guide about approaching bad weather, and, by the time they had gathered themselves together, they were unable to retreat to safety in the boat that was clearly inadequate for their changed circumstances. After a period of considerable concern for their safety, tragedy was narrowly averted only because friends ashore became aware of their situation and sent out a more capable boat to rescue them. Further cricket matches took place over the decades, thus establishing a tradition that continues to this day.

There are a number of other stories in which a tragic outcome ensued because foolhardy individuals failed to take proper precautions. However, there are many more in which experienced seamen have been lost in comparatively mild weather and the descriptions in Treanor’s excellent book of some of the many tragedies that occurred here are harrowing.

On a lighter note, in August 1887, we are told that a group of cyclists arrived from London intent on conducting a cycling race on the sands. Needless to say, there were great difficulties in preventing their wheels from sinking in the sand, but they were eventually successful enough to find a one-mile strip that was hard enough for a satisfactory race.²⁰

A rather more curious desire has been described

¹⁷ Gattie, p3.

¹⁸ Skempton, A W: *John Smeaton FRS*, Thomas Telford Ltd, London, (1981).

¹⁹ Gattie, p39-41.

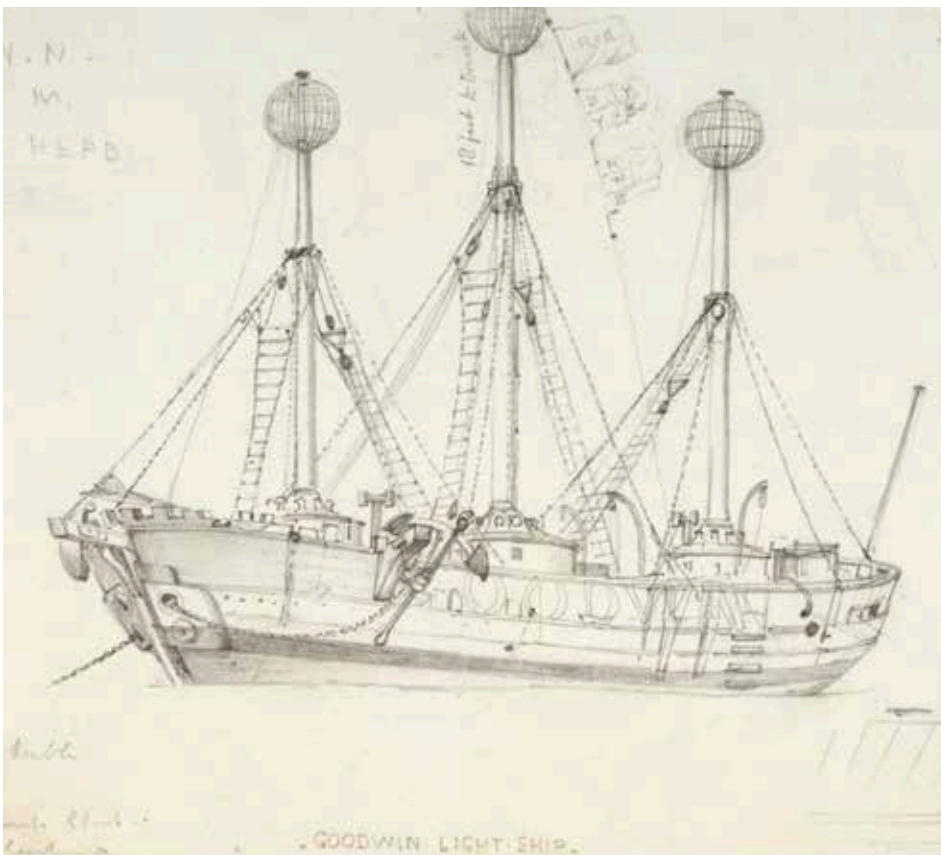
²⁰ Gattie, p42.

in which certain individuals have expressed the wish to be buried on the sandbanks. Gattie relates how, as early as 1705, a deceased 84-year-old man was wrapped in lead and buried at sea on the Goodwin Sands. "This occasioned much discourse, he having had no relation at all to the sea."²¹ Even more surprising is the story of a skipper who arrived in Hamburg which, according to the *London Evening Post*:

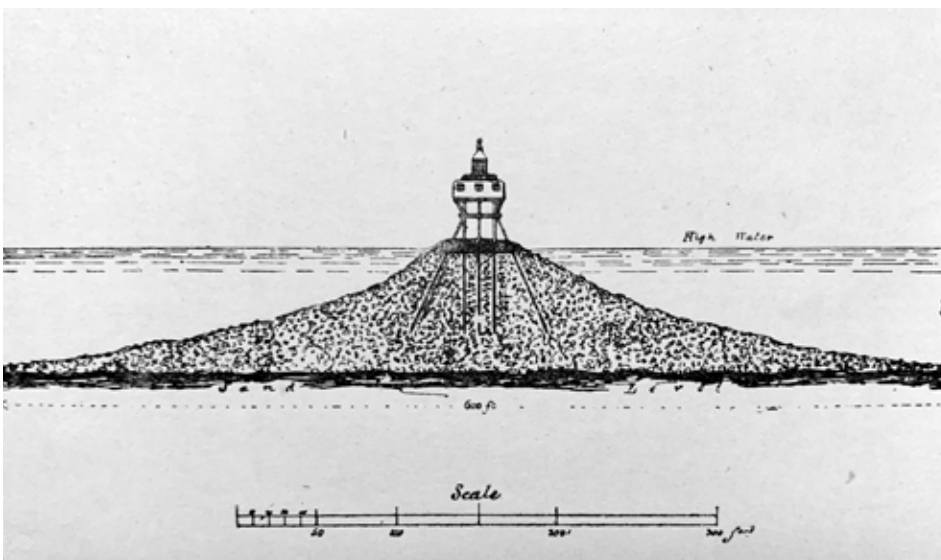
"... took up a coffin made in the English manner, and with the following inscription upon a silver plate, Mr Francis Humphrey Merrydith, died 25 March 1751, aged 51, which coffin the said captain carried to Hamburg, and then opened it, in which was enclosed a leaden one, and the body of an elderly man enbalm'd and dressed in fine linen. This is the corpse that was buried in the Goodwin Sands a few weeks ago, according to the will of the deceased."

Gattie was not amused:

"This much for the extract from the *London Evening Post*. But the writer quite omits to tell his readers how it was that Captain Pederson took up the coffin. Was he dragging a trawl net after him? Or did his anchor foul the coffin? It would also be rather instructive to know what he ultimately did with this coffin, after having so improperly and unscrupulously presumed to open it. It is a disagreeable and unsatisfactory story at best."²²



ABOVE: A contemporary drawing of the first lightship moored on the North Sands Head of the Goodwin Sands off Ramsgate and North Foreland.



ABOVE: A design for a lighthouse on the Goodwin Sands was prepared by the Scottish engineer, Thomas Stevenson in 1848. He proposed to make a cone of rubble 600 ft (200 m) in diameter at the base in the same manner as the breakwaters at Plymouth and Portland. The cone would rise to 10 ft (3 m) above high water on which would be constructed a timber lighthouse with a keepers' accommodation space and a lantern on top. The plan was judged to be both simple and feasible, but for unknown reasons was never tried. [Gattie, p242-3.]

21 Gattie, p43-44.

22 Gattie, p44-45.



The mooring site of the first lightship on North Sands Head.

Kentish Weekly Post 1794

The Corporation of the Trinity House have now caused a vessel fitted for a Floating Light to be placed near the Goodwin Sand, about a mile north-east from the North Sand Head, between the North and South Forelands: on which vessel three distinct lights are exhibited, to distinguish them from the North and South Foreland lights, and which will be constantly attended, and kept burning from sun-setting to sun-rising, for the benefits of navigation. A large bell is also fixed on board which will be rung in hazy or thick weather to warn ships of the danger as they approach the said sand, when the lights may not be seen.

Kentish Gazette 1794

The Corporation of Trinity House have given public notice that a white buoy is laid on a bank on the west side of the channel, called the Gull Stream, leading into the Downs, in 4 1/2 fathoms at low water neap tides, with the following marks and bearings: Saint Lawrence church about the middle of the houses on the cliff of Ramsgate, called Albion Place, between W 3/4 W. The North Foreland N by W ... South Foreland upper light, on the ... cliff of Old Stairs Bay; and the pitch of the ... Foreland about SW. A temporary vessel is fixed on the northern ... head, in place of the other vessel, that broke her moorings in the late tempestuous weather ... is going through some repairs, and an alteration to her lights, by order of the Masters of the Trinity House.





On our visit to the northern tip of the hazardous “Ship Swallower” sands in 2021, our skipper - a local Ramsgate pilot - could not risk going any closer to the North Sand Head of the Goodwins. He was shocked at just how much the sands had shifted since his last visit. Only seals and seagulls have no fear of approaching this extremely hazardous sandbank.