

Harwich Historic Features

Whilst searching on Rightmove across East Anglia for somewhere to move to, I came across this interesting item, The Harwich Treadwheel Crane.



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It is the only example of a double tread wheeled crane remaining in the UK. Samuel Pepys was expanding Harwich Dockyard in 1667 under the instructions of the Duke of York to improve it for British ships at war with the Dutch.

The wooden hut 26ft3" by 14ft10" provides the crane frame from which the 12"x10" jib projects by 17ft 10". The crane was operated by two men walking inside a pair of 16ft diameter tread wheels, set 4ft apart on a common axle, itself made of wood and 14" square. There was no brake so a piece of wood was always on hand to jam the tread wheel when necessary.

At the time it cost £392 to build and served the dockyard 260yrs. The dockyard closed in 1928 when the crane was moved to Harwich Green where it still stands today.

The Romans used this type of crane in 25BC and was in common use here in the Middle Ages.

In 1664, Sir William Batten, surveyor of H.M. Navy was granted a patent to set up lighthouses in Harwich. The high light was lit by a coal fired hearth and was installed on the old Town Gate. The low light stood on the foreshore 200yds away. This was a simple wooden structure lit by a single candle in a hoistable lantern.

It emerged that passing by ships also had to pay Sir William the fees 12d on every cauldron of coal, and halfpenny per ton of other goods as well as the port users. (foreign ships were charged double). He made a fortune but was soon resented.



Oxyman / High Lighthouse, Harwich Society

In 1818 the old structures were rebuilt in brick and used oil lamps. In the late 19thC a canopy was built around the low light to allow walkers shelter. In 1909 it became a dwelling with a clause that



if needed by Trinity House it could be returned to them. It did indeed do this in 1969 when it became a VHF station and became a look out for their pilots.

Today both are small museums-the low a Maritime Museum and the high the National Vintage Wireless and Television Museum Trust