

An Introduction

Southampton and its surrounding area have a long and rich history. There is much to learn about the first settlers in the area and how its population changed over time. In this study, children will gain an understanding of how Southampton became the place we know and love today.

What you need to know

Southampton's history begins in the Palaeolithic period, evidenced by hand axes found in gravel beds around Highfield, Southampton Common, Shirley, Coxford and Nursling. These discoveries show that early hunter-gatherers regularly visited the area. In the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods, people settled for longer periods and developed early farming.

During the Bronze Age, the area became an important centre for technology and trade. At Testwood Lakes near Totton, archaeologists found Britain's earliest identified wooden bridge, built around 1,500 BC, along with one of the country's earliest sea-going boats and a bronze rapier blade placed as a probable religious offering. These finds reveal skilled craftsmanship and long-distance travel.

The Iron Age (from around 800 BC) saw the development of permanent settlements. Earthworks at Lordswood and Aldermoor, along with pottery, loom weights and barley seeds from Regents Park and Maddison Street, show active farming and textile production. Trade links with nearby sites such as Hengistbury Head were well established.

Roman influence began with the invasion of AD 43. The Romans built the settlement of Clausentum at Bitterne Manor. Excavations have uncovered a warehouse, decorated stone buildings, defensive ditches and imported goods such as Samian pottery, lead ingots and olive oil. A hoard of around 4,000 coins buried at Millbrook around AD 293 also highlights the area's importance as a trading port.

After Roman rule collapsed in the early 5th century, Anglo-Saxons established Hamwic, a trading town discovered beneath the site of St Mary's Stadium during excavations in 1999. Hamwic had blacksmiths, weavers and glassmakers, and more than 200 coins suggest a Royal Mint may have operated there. Imported goods show that international trade continued, and a pagan cemetery revealed high-status burials.

Following Viking raids in AD 837 and AD 842, Southampton became one of King Alfred's fortified burhs. After 1066, the Normans expanded the port's role as a link between Winchester and Normandy. The Domesday Book of 1086 recorded around 186 households, and buildings such as the castle and St Michael's Church strengthened the town's status.

By the medieval period, Southampton was a thriving deep-water harbour, exporting wool and importing wine. Merchants built stone warehouses and undercrofts, around forty of which still survive. The town was attacked in October 1338 during the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), leading to major improvements to the town walls. The Black Death reached

Southampton in 1348, and in 1415 the Southampton Plot against Henry V was uncovered shortly before his army sailed from the port on 11th August 1415. Shipbuilding was significant, including the completion of Henry V's Grace Dieu in 1418.

Southampton remained busy during the Tudor and early modern period. Foreign merchants (including the Italian Cristoforo Ambrugi) lived in the town, and records show a diverse population, such as an African carpenter noted in 1492 and the diver Jacques Francis, who helped salvage the Mary Rose after it sank in 1545. Henry VIII strengthened Solent defences from c.1540, and the town later welcomed religious refugees. The English Civil War arrived in 1642, and a major plague outbreak in June 1665 caused about 1,200 deaths. Important buildings from this time include the Wool House, Tudor House and God's House Tower.

By the eighteenth century, Southampton had declined, but it revived as a fashionable spa resort. The Itchen Navigation (1710), new leisure facilities and regular coach services supported its renewal. Transport improvements shaped the nineteenth century: Northam Bridge opened in 1799; steam vessels ran from about 1823; and the railway arrived in 1840. New docks, including the Empress Dock opened by Queen Victoria on 26th July 1890, enabled larger ships to visit. The RMS Titanic sailed from Southampton on 10th April 1912 setting off on her fateful journey.

During World War 1, Southampton was designated Embarkation Port No. 1. Between 1914 and 1918, more than 7 million troop movements passed through the port, and up to 350 trains arrived in forty-five hours during the early stages of the war. The town supported Belgian refugees and employed many women in munitions factories. After the war, Southampton expanded rapidly, doubling in size in 1920.

During World War 2, Southampton was a major target due to its docks and aircraft production, particularly the Supermarine Spitfire, which first flew from Southampton Airport in 1936. Between 1940 and 1945, the town suffered fifty-seven air raids, including severe attacks on 23rd and 30th November and 1st December 1940. In 1944, the docks were used by the United States Army, and around 3.5 million troops departed for the D-Day landings. After 1945, widespread rebuilding took place, assisted by the 1952 Development Plan. The University of Southampton was also established in 1952. Post-war migration, including Basque children in 1937 and Caribbean arrivals from 1947, helped shape the modern city.

Resources

Our key enquiry questions, sources, PowerPoints, activities, and other resources will help to build children's understanding of their local area of Southampton and answer the question 'How has Southampton changed over time?'

Get in touch

Is there an area of local history you'd love to see on our Local History Hub?
Get in touch to learn how we can work together! Email

LocalHistory@tpet.co.uk
to find out more.



Local History

Historic England and Teacher's Pet have come together to bring you a collection of free resources that you can use in your local history teaching.



**Historic
England**



Teacher's Pet

Who are Teacher's Pet?

Teacher's Pet have been providing downloadable and playable educational content to early years and primary school teachers for over 14 years. We cover all areas of the curriculum and use a team of in-house teachers and designers to create engaging and memorable concepts, that the children will love.

Why local history?

At [Teacher's Pet](#) we want to empower primary school teachers by giving them the tools they need to deliver inspiring and thoughtful lessons about the local area and its history. We believe local history teaching has such an important part to play in a child's wellbeing – helping to give children a sense of pride in where they live.

Our Local History project is designed to provide teachers across the UK with everything they need to successfully carry out a full scheme of teaching about their local area, through key enquiry questions and source led activities.

Working with [Historic England](#) gives us access to archived maps and photos for resources and information from knowledgeable local historians, as well helping us to provide the content to you free of charge.

For more information about our Local History project or to find out more about Teacher's Pet Classroom Resources, please visit our website.