

Norfolk Record Office Information Leaflet 20

Key dates in the history of Great Yarmouth

900	By this time the sandbank on which Yarmouth is built had emerged from the sea. An early tradition suggests that the first settlement was made by a temporary colony of fishermen for the duration of the fishing season only: this first settlement was probably at Fuller's Hill.
1086	Domesday Book records that Yarmouth was already a small but flourishing royal borough with a church, seventy burgesses and twenty-four fishermen belonging to the neighbouring manor of Gorleston - a total population of perhaps 400 people.
1119	Yarmouth church completed on its present site.
1198	First archive reference to the 'Rows'. These developed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and were a unique form of town development - a 'gridiron' of narrow parallel passages with houses which had only one room up and down. When more space was needed, extra rooms were added at the back so that some houses were eventually back to back with properties on neighbouring rows. Special narrow carts (known as 'troll carts') had to be used to carry goods along the passages: there is one in the Tolhouse Museum. The Rows were almost totally destroyed in World War II.
1208	King John granted the borough its first charter including right of toll (that is, of holding a market). The charter promised that Yarmouth 'shall be a free borough forever.'
1261	King Henry III granted the town leave to build a town wall and ditch, and to have a prison. Much of the wall survives, as does the gaol (beneath the Tolhouse, the late thirteenth-century 'town hall').
1278	Hospital of St Mary the Virgin founded on the east side of the Market Place. After the Dissolution the site passed to Yarmouth Corporation who used it as a Workhouse, a Grammar School and for a variety of other purposes.
1297	The most serious outbreak of violence between men of Yarmouth and men of the Cinque Ports. The Cinque Port ships attacked the Yarmouth ships in the English fleet: at least 17 and perhaps as many as 37 ships were lost.
1334	The lay subsidy (taxation) rolls for this year show that Yarmouth raised more money than any other town apart from York, Bristol and Newcastle. The town's wealth was based entirely on the herring fishery, the mainstay of Yarmouth from its beginnings until well into the twentieth century.
1340	Yarmouth ships did outstanding service at the Battle of Sluys (against the French). The English fleet was led by Admiral John Perbroune of Yarmouth.
1349	The Black Death hit Yarmouth very severely.

c. 1378	John Fastolf born in Yarmouth. He fought many battles against the French including the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. He built Caister Castle in 1443. Fastolf died in 1459 and was buried at St Benet's Abbey.
1417	First bridge built over the river, replacing a ferry.
1551	Yarmouth Grammar School founded.
1559	Building on the present harbour began. The original mouth of the river had silted up in the early fourteenth century and since 1346 six attempts had been made to secure a satisfactory harbour.
1570	Permission granted for 30 refugee families from the Netherlands to settle at Yarmouth.
c.1570-1640	During a period of prosperity, the town was virtually completely rebuilt and it survived in this form until the Second World War.
1578	Severe plague in Yarmouth.
1588	Spanish Armada: Yarmouth was defended against invasion. The walls were strengthened and earthworks built behind them.
1640s	In the Civil War Yarmouth supported Parliament against the King. John Carter, a Yarmouth bailiff, was living in the house on the Quay now known as the Elizabethan House Museum. He persuaded Yarmouth Corporation to melt down its civic plate to raise money for the Parliamentarian forces. In 1648 the Parliamentary leaders - including Oliver Cromwell - are supposed to have met at Carter's house and decided that King Charles I must be tried and executed.
1642	Congregational church founded in Middlegate Street.
1646	'Yarmouth Witchcraft Trials' - 11 people tried for devilish practices by Yarmouth Sessions court after the 'Witchfinder-General' Matthew Hopkins had been invited to the town to seek out witches. Six women were found guilty and hanged.
1649	Miles Corbett, MP for Yarmouth, was one of those who sat on the Commission that tried King Charles I and signed the warrant for the King's execution.
1654	Children's Hospital founded.
1660	The restoration of the monarchy. All those who had signed King Charles' death warrant were condemned to death. Corbett fled to Holland but in 1662 he was seized, brought back to England and hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn in London.
1662	The Cinque ports stopped sending representatives to Yarmouth to share in governing the town during the autumn herring fishing season. They had been coming every year since the eleventh century.
1665	Severe plague in Yarmouth.
1670	First Haven Act set up Port and Haven Commissioners who could impose dues on all cargoes except fish and use the money to maintain the harbour.
1681	Southtown became part of the borough of Great Yarmouth.
1684	Yarmouth's first mayor appointed under a charter of King Charles II.
1692	Quaker Meeting House opened in what is now Howard Street.
1702	Fisherman's Hospital built.
1703	The greatest storm ever known on the East coast.

1714	St George's Chapel began. It closed for worship in 1959 and is now a theatre.
1720	John Andrews, known as 'the greatest herring merchant in Europe', built his new house, now 20 South Quay. It became the Customs House in 1802 and the Port Authority Office in 1985.
1724	Daniel Defoe published his <i>A Tour Through Great Britain</i> which includes a description of Yarmouth. Defoe's most famous book, <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> , begins with a storm off Yarmouth.
1759	Sea Baths opened near the beach. From this time Yarmouth began to assume its modern role as a seaside resort and the town began to spread from the river towards the sea.
1778	The theatre on Theatre Plain opened.
1792	Riot in Yarmouth because of the price of corn. The authorities suppressed the riot without calling in the army and as a result the Mayor, Edmund Lacon, was knighted.
1796	The radical orator John Thelwall gave a talk in Yarmouth: sailors tried to seize him and over 40 people were hurt in the scuffle.
1797	The British fleet defeated the Dutch navy off the coast of Holland at the Battle of Camperdown. The victorious fleet sailed into Yarmouth bringing back seven Dutch ships as prizes. Wounded men from both sides were taken to Yarmouth Barracks. Several died of their wounds, including the Dutch Captain Gysbert Jan van Rysoort: they are buried in St Nicholas' church.
1800	Admiral Horatio Nelson was granted the freedom of Great Yarmouth.
1800-1811	The Naval Hospital built. It was later used as a Barracks. It has now been converted into flats.
1801	In March the British Fleet gathered in Yarmouth Roads. Nelson joined the Fleet at Yarmouth and sailed to the Baltic, winning the Battle of Copenhagen on 1 April 1801.
1806	Naval Arsenal built in Southtown.
1807	The <i>Snipe</i> was wrecked within 50 yards of the shore, with the loss of 67 lives. Captain William Manby witnessed the tragedy and developed his rocket life-saving apparatus as a result. When the <i>Elizabeth</i> was wrecked within 150 yards of the shore a year later, the apparatus was used and all lives were saved.
1812-1823	The artist John Sell Cotman lived and worked in Yarmouth. The house where he lived is now 83-84 Southtown Road.
1814-1819	Nelson Monument built on South Denes. The designer was William Wilkins and the superintendent of works Thomas Sutton, the town surveyor. In 1819 Sutton climbed the stairs of the monument but was taken ill and died there.
1820	Anna Sewell born in the house in Yarmouth now named after her. She wrote <i>Black Beauty</i> in 1877 when living in Norwich. Anna's mother Mary Sewell wrote best-selling moral ballads, the most famous being <i>Mother's Last Words</i> .
1828	David Service, the ' <i>Shoemaker Poet</i> ' died in Yarmouth. He was born in Scotland but worked as a cobbler in Yarmouth. He was a poet and also a great drinker - one of his poems is a tour of Yarmouth public houses with a description of each.

1834	Turnpike Act passed to build the road across the marshes now known as the Acle Straight.
1835	Gorleston became part of the borough of Great Yarmouth under the Municipal Reform Act.
1838	New Yarmouth Workhouse built. It later became the Northgate Hospital.
1839	Yarmouth Hospital built on Deneside. A new Hospital on the same site was built in 1888. The site was sold when the James Paget Hospital opened in 1982.
1843	Death of Sarah Martin, Yarmouth prison visitor. She taught the prisoners in the Tolhouse to read and write, and taught the women how to make clothes. She also raised money for a fund to provide for prisoners on their release from gaol. She is buried in Caister churchyard.
1844	The Yarmouth - Norwich railway was opened.
1845	The Yarmouth Suspension Bridge disaster: about 80 people were drowned, mainly children. They had crowded onto the bridge to see a circus clown go down the river in a barrel pulled by geese. The tombstone of George Beloe (aged nine) in St Nicholas' churchyard depicts the bridge collapsing.
1847	Disputed Parliamentary election led to an enquiry. In 1848 all the freemen of Yarmouth were deprived of their right to vote because of the gross bribery that had taken place in several elections.
1849	Charles Dickens visited Yarmouth, staying at the Royal Hotel and also at the Feathers Inn in Gorleston. A large part of his book <i>David Copperfield</i> is set in Yarmouth.
1851	Sailors' strike in Yarmouth over wages led to a riot on the Quay on 22 February. Yarmouth authorities had to call in soldiers from Norwich. Several people were injured. By 15 March the strike ended in a victory for the sailors.
1853	Wellington pier built: Yarmouth sea front beginning to take on its present appearance.
1857	Britannia Pier built.
1858	Shipwrecked Sailors Home opened: in its first 25 years nearly 4,000 sailors stayed there. It is now the Maritime Museum for East Anglia.
1863	Twenty Yarmouth ships were wrecked and 145 men drowned in one December gale.
1866	St George's Park laid out.
1872-1875	C J Palmer published <i>The Perlustration of Great Yarmouth with Gorleston and Southtown</i> in three volumes.
1878-1892	Town Hall built: the architect was John B Pearce. The west part of the building soon began to subside and had to be underpinned with iron cylinders filled with concrete.
1887	Gorleston lighthouse built.
1890	Runham Vauxhall was brought into the borough and the whole borough was assigned to the county of Norfolk.
1902	First electric trams in Yarmouth.
1903	Hippodrome opened, one of only two purpose built circus buildings in England.
1903	Winter Gardens brought to Yarmouth from Torquay.

1912	The East Anglian School, catering for blind and deaf children, opened at Gorleston.
1913	Record year for the herring industry - 1163 boats used the port and over 12 hundred million fish were caught.
1914-1918	First World War. Yarmouth suffered Zeppelin and air raids and was also bombarded by German ships. A plaque on a house in St Peter's Plain records that it was the first house in Britain hit by Zeppelin raids. The War Memorial in St George's Park lists the names of 1,472 Yarmouth men killed in action.
1924	Mrs Leach became Yarmouth's first woman mayor.
1933	Trams in Yarmouth replaced by buses.
1938	St Peter the Apostle Roman Catholic church Gorleston built: it is the only church designed by the sculptor Eric Gill.
1939-1945	Second World War Yarmouth suffered severely from bombing, probably more than any other town in England. The church was gutted by fire after bombing in 1942.
1950s	The 'fish finger' invented at the Bird's Eye factory in Yarmouth.
1953	Yarmouth Town beat Crystal Palace in the F A Cup, their only victory over Football League opponents - so far!
1957-1960	St Nicholas church rebuilt: the architect was Stephen Dykes Bower.
1959-1960	Tolhouse reconstructed after war damage.
1978-1981	James Paget Hospital Gorleston built.
1981	Marina Leisure Centre opened on seafront.
1985	Breydon High Bridge opened, with the longest lifting section of any bridge in Britain.
1997	Cora Batley became the first woman 'freeman' of Yarmouth.



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Produced by:

Norfolk Record Office
The Archive Centre
Martineau Lane
Norwich
NR1 2DQ

Tel: 01603 222599
Fax: 01603 761885
E-mail: norfec@norfolk.gov.uk
Website: <http://archives.norfolk.gov.uk/>



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