

## OUR AREA'S LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS

Yarmouth Parish consists of the historic town of Yarmouth, the village of Thorley and a number of smaller isolated settlements such as those at Tapnell and Barnsfield. With a total area of 691.8 hectares the parish has a very diverse landscape and rich natural and historic environment, demonstrated by the number of local, national and international designations within the area.

### LANDSCAPE

The landscape of this rural parish has great variety. Dramatic species-rich rolling chalk downland rises in the south contrasting with the gentle tidal shores of the Western Yar Estuary in the northwest. Further important wetlands such as the marshes at Rofford and water meadows bounding Thorley Brook and Barnsfield Stream add to the diversity of the landscape. The wide views of the Solent from the narrow strip of beach in the north, the expansive open farmland in the east and the clustered small copses in the west, all add to the strong character of the area. The highest point in the parish at 140 metres above sea level is the very south-east tip of the parish boundary on the ridge of Tapnell Down.

Some 30% of the area falls within the Isle of Wight Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) part of a family of nationally protected landscapes reserved for the most treasured parts of the country.

### HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Yarmouth, Thorley and their surrounding countryside have a rich history.

Archaeological remains from prehistoric, bronze age, iron age, Romano-British and medieval periods have been found telling us that people have lived in the area for thousands of years. There are four areas of high archaeological potential: (i) property plots along High Street, St James Street, and around Bridge Road, Quay Street and the Quay; (ii) the old Churchyard; (iii) the area south-east of the Churchyard; and (iv) the area of land known as the Draft Haven.

The Isle of Wight Council has recently published an Historic Environment Action Plan (HEAP). The Urban Settlement, Rural

Settlement and Thorley/Wellow Plain HEAPs are relevant to our area.



The George Hotel and Yarmouth Castle © JB

Yarmouth is a very special historic town with the first mention of a settlement in the area being in 991 in relation to Danegelt tax. A planned medieval borough, its Royal Charter in 1135 was the first of seven. The final one, the Great Charter, was granted by James I in 1609. Henry VIII ordered the building of Yarmouth Castle, now a scheduled monument, which was finished in 1547. King Charles I visited the town on a number of occasions, the last being in 1648 on his way to his execution in London. In the 1670s King Charles II visited his friend Sir Robert Holmes at least twice. Sir Robert was then the Governor of the Island and lived in his grand Yarmouth house (now the George Hotel); a far cry from his earlier buccaneering days as an English Admiral against the French and Dutch. The Town Hall contains the five remaining Charters and many other historical artefacts. The town was represented in Parliament for some five hundred years, for half that time by two members, until the Reform Act of 1830. The Town Hall and Pier were both built in 1875. In the 1880s Yarmouth was declared a "Rotten Borough" and lost its borough status.

The present Thorley Manor is a Grade II\* listed building dating from 1712. The original Manor was mentioned in the Domesday Book. The adjacent remains of the medieval church of St Swithin's is also Grade II\*. Thorley Brook was originally a navigable tidal creek known as the Draft Haven. In the thirteenth century Thorley Haven (with Yarmouth) was the largest port on the Island. Ships used its quays until as late as the 1660s. A gradual silting up of the area and its sealing off by the creation of the causeway in 1664 led to its abandonment and the increased importance of the port of Yarmouth. Remains can still be seen although now covered in grass.

There are many Listed Buildings throughout the area particularly in the historic town of Yarmouth. The Yarmouth Conservation Area was designated in 1969 in recognition of the special architectural and historic importance of the town. The emphasis within Conservation Areas is on ensuring local character is strengthened, not diminished, by change. See map on page 9

### **BIODIVERSITY**

The variety or diversity of plants and animals is often referred to as 'Biodiversity' and its importance is reflected in the range of special sites that are designated for their nature conservation interest. The designated sites that are within the Yarmouth and Thorley area are all in some way helping to conserve the plants and animals that make the area special. Internationally important sites in the area include Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area, Ramsar site; national designations include Sites of Special Scientific Interest and local designations include Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. See map on page 10

Yarmouth and Thorley sit within a beautiful natural environment that is highly valued, with tidal waters, mudflats, saltmarsh, wetlands, farmland and woodland all providing a home or 'habitat' for the wealth of wildlife. The interaction between the different

features of the area is fascinating and many plants and animals are specially adapted to live in one specific environment. The more mobile species rely on the quality of a much larger area of habitat.

The Western Yar estuary, for example, is part of a network of important coastal sites throughout the Solent that supports the movement of wildlife and the interaction of different coastal processes. These areas are internationally important as they are excellent examples of coastal habitats within Europe and support the migration routes of birds across the world.



Red Squirrel © RT



Oystercatchers © AM



Mute Swan on Thorley Brook © IWC CS