

Lee -on-the-Solent



Historical tour of the town and seafront



The Solent Way



This waymarked long distance coastal footpath passes through Lee-on-the-Solent. You can join it on the seafront, and walk 3.5km/2.2miles West to Hillhead Harbour and the attractive Titchfield Haven Nature Reserve. The Reserve has 350 acres of varied wetland habitats, with hides, paths and great bird watching. Haven House Visitor Centre offers friendly tearooms and visitor information.

To the East you can follow it along the shore line to Stokes Bay and Gilkicker Point (5.7km/3.5miles). On the way you will pass Browdown ranges, which is an unusual shingle habitat. The area has been used for military training for more than 300 years, and is still used as a firing range today. Browdown Battery (built in 1888) is situated in the army training camp. Historic features around Stokes Bay include Fort Gilkicker and No. 2 Battery (the latter open to the public during the summer). Fort Gilkicker is one of six forts which ran from Stokes Bay to Fareham. These fortifications were part of a project initiated by Lord Palmerston in 1858, that turned Portsmouth into one of the mostly strongly defended places in the world. The salt lagoon and the foreshore of Gilkicker Point are a special place for wildlife and the areas of open space include a golf course and playing fields, tennis courts, a putting green and paddling pool.

Further information and a detailed route description is available on the web:
www.hants.gov.uk/walking/solentway

This leaflet is available in alternative formats 01962 870500

Local Attractions

The beaches at Lee-on-the-Solent and Stokes Bay provide some of the cleanest and safest bathing waters along the south coast. The sheltered coastal waters make it ideal for sea anglers and watersports enthusiasts. You can enjoy watersports of all kinds, sailing, windsurfing, jet-skiing and pleasure boating. Perhaps you would prefer to sit and watch the ever changing scenes, and enjoy an ice cream or some of the other refreshments offered by Lee-on-the-Solent's restaurants, wine bars, bistros and tea-rooms.

There are many other attractions in and around Lee-on-the-Solent, including:

- Hillhead Harbour and Titchfield Haven Nature Reserve
- Alver Valley and Wildgrounds
- Fort Brockhurst, Gunners Way, Gosport
- Explosion! Priddy's Hard, Gosport
- Royal Navy Submarine Museum, Haslar Marina, Gosport
- 1642 Living History Village, Grange Farm, Gosport
- Gilkicker Point, Fort Gilkicker and No. 2 Battery
- Gosport Museum, Gosport High Street
- Lee-on-the-Solent and Gosport Libraries



Hill Head and Haven House

For further information about these and other facilities in the area please contact Gosport Tourist Information Centre, in the Bus Station Complex, South Street, Gosport,

tel: (023) 9252 2944;

e-mail: tourism@gosport.gov.uk

or visit the Tourism South East website:

www.gosouth.co.uk

Introduction

You can get to know Lee-on-the-Solent better by taking the circular walk around the town and seafront described inside this leaflet. The route is on level ground and is about 2 kilometres (1.2miles) long. Walking at a gentle pace it should take most people between 45-60 minutes to complete. It passes some of the most important landmarks in the history of Lee-on-the-Solent. Starting at the Interpretation panel on the Seafront, the route passes through the town centre, along the site of a Medieval track, through the Victorian and Edwardian planned town and back along the seafront promenade, with its panoramic views of the Solent and the Isle of Wight.

Lee Pier c1900
front cover
Entertainment on Lee Pier,
'Howards Joy Bells'

On a clear day it is possible to see the nearer parts of the Isle of Wight, including Ryde, Cowes and Norris Castle. To the West you may be able to see Calshot Castle, at the entrance to Southampton Water and beyond it the New Forest. On bright days, the cliffs and hills of the distant Isle of Purbeck can be seen.

History

In 1884 Mr C E Newton Robinson persuaded his father, a wealthy Dorset landowner, to purchase much land in the area and they spent the next 25 years investing in Lee-on-the-Solent to develop the settlement into a watering spa. The late Victorian era saw expansion of Lee-on-the-Solent with the building of grand houses, the pier and a branch railway. When the pier first opened in 1888, it provided a stopping point for paddle steamers which ran between Southampton, Lee Pier, Stokes Bay, Portsmouth, Cowes and Ryde Pier.

During World War 1, the area was identified as an excellent location for a naval aviation base. In 1917, the station that would later become HMS Daedalus opened as the HM Naval Seaplane Training School and Hangars, workshops, accommodation and a double slipway into the sea, were constructed.

The 1920s and 1930s are the dominant era in the development of the modern character of much of Lee-on-the-Solent, and in particular the extensive seafront development along Marine Parade. The airfield reached its heyday during the 1930s. In 1939 the station was named HMS Daedalus after a mythical Greek character who fabricated wings to enable him to fly.

HMS Daedalus played an important part in World War II, training pilots, defending Southampton and Portsmouth and operating planes in the Dunkirk Evacuation, the Battle of Britain, D-Day, VJ Day and other air operations.

Leading up to the D-Day landings, the United States Navy made their Headquarters in Lee Tower. The Solent filled with ships from the Allied Navies. Along the shore, at places such as Lepe and Browdown, mystery objects were built. Later was it revealed that these were Mulberry Harbours for the protection of ships landing on the continent. From Pier Street and the pier the Allied Armies embarked for D Day 6th June 1944. The vast assembled fleets of ships of the Allied Navies weighed anchors and put to sea and planes took off from Lee Airfield.

Following the end of the war, HMS Daedalus continued to play an important military role with its aircraft operating in the Korean War, Suez, Aden and the Indonesian conflicts. In 1947 it became one of the first Royal Navy bases to operate helicopters. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Naval Hovercraft Trials Unit made extensive use of the seaplane slipway. By the 1980s the Station had lost its operations status, as commitments were relocated elsewhere. The Station was formally closed as a Naval Establishment in 1996. The north part of the site still functions as an airfield and is used by clubs, the HM Coastguard Search and Rescue and the Hampshire Police Air Support Unit.

Historical tour

Lee Tower c1950 and from the sea c1960



Early biplane in Lee-on-the-Solent c1912



Bulsons Store, High Street, c1903

1 Promenade and Remembrance Gardens

The promenade and remembrance gardens are situated on the site of the Lee Tower, a bold 1930s art deco building which housed a cinema, a ballroom and other leisure activities, with a distinctive 120ft viewing tower. In front of Lee Tower, protruding out into the sea was the 120ft long Lee Pier, built by the Victorians. As an anti-invasion measure, at the beginning of World War II, the Army rendered the pier unusable by throwing planks into the sea. It was later repaired by the United States Army and used as a launch point for the D-day landings on 4th June 1944. The Pier was demolished in 1958. Lee Tower never lived up to its promise as the place "where the rainbow ends" and was eventually demolished in 1971.

3 Manor Way

Manor Way is located on the site of the original medieval track joining the area's agricultural settlements with the villages of Titchfield and Stubbington. The late Victorian and Edwardian villas make the greatest contribution to this area's pleasant suburban character.

Two important buildings which date back to the medieval origins of this road are Le Breton Farmhouse and The Bun Penny. Le Breton farmhouse is a Grade II listed building. It is an exceptional example of a 14th century manorial farmhouse, which belonged to Gilbertus Le Bret La Bruton who needed to replace his great Manor House (situated on a different site) after it was completely destroyed by fire in 1315. The Bun Penny Public House began life as a farmhouse in the 17th century. In the late 19th century it was adapted for use as the 'Victoria Hotel'.

Lee-on-the-Solent's elegant Fleet Air Arm World War II Memorial is situated on the corner of Richmond Road and Marine Parade West. Built by the Imperial War Graves Commission, the memorial has a central white pillar surrounded by tablets of green Westmorland slate, on which are inscribed the names of the dead.

Further along Marine Parade you can see several large grey corrugated iron hangars. These structures dating from 1917, are some of the earliest examples of purpose built hangars. The area is currently used by the Hovercraft Museum Trust. The main purpose of the museum is for hovercraft storage and restoration. Opposite this area is a double slipway down to the Beach, which was used to launch seaplanes and later, hovercraft.

Fire on Lee Pier 1932



The War Memorial and Remembrance Gardens are in a sunken area sheltered from the wind.

The amusement arcade was once the booking hall for the Lee Railway Station and is all that remains of the Station and Railway line, which closed in 1930. The Marina Buildings and Solent Buildings, which were built around the same time as the Lee Tower, and are a unique example in Gosport Borough of the modernist architecture fashionable in the 1930s.

4 The Church of St. Faith and Victoria Square

The laying out of Victoria Square and the inclusion of a Church were part of the original proposals for the development of Lee-on-the-Solent as a Seaside Watering Spa. The Anglican Church of St. Faith is a Grade II listed building. Designed by architects Seely and Paget, and built in 1933 the church has a renaissance style exterior. The elegant and simple whitewashed interior of the church is worth viewing.



HM Naval Seaplane Training School

5 World War II Memorial and HMS Daedalus

On Richmond Road and along the Seafront are the high wall and railings of the former HMS Daedalus. Through an ornamental gateway it is possible to glimpse the impressive Wardroom and Westcliffe Lodge. The Wardroom, which dates back to 1933, is an interesting 3-storey building with a domestic arts and craft character.

6 Marine Parade

The seafront at Lee-on-the-Solent is one of the most developed stretches of the Solent on the mainland. By the end of the 1930s virtually all of the plots on the seafront had been developed and this, along with the open cliffs, helps to give the seafront its distinctive character.

Part of the way along Marine Parade West, you will observe a Children's Play area, which used to be the site of Lee-on-the-Solent Lido. The Lido was said to be the only open-air heated seawater bathing pool in England when it was constructed in the 1930s.

2 Pier Street and High Street

Pier Street and its junction with High Street is at the centre of the town's primary shopping area.

The Edwardian buildings 1-23 (odds) on the Eastern side of Pier Street are of fine architectural detailing, notably the timber balustrade balcony, high pitched roof and full dormers.



1-23 Pier Street c1910

