

# Redlynch & District Local History Society

## Southampton 1610-1840

by Jake Simpson

The area around Southampton area gradually became occupied around 2,000 years ago. About 70 AD the Romans built a town on a bend of the river Itchen where the East end of the Northam Bridge now stands: gradually the streets were laid out in a grid pattern and by the second century the town was fortified. The town was abandoned soon after the Roman Army left Britain.

Saxon Southampton developed about 690-700 AD and stood where St. Mary's church is today. This new town was called Hamwic. The population of the Saxon town had a population of 4,000-5,000 which was very large by the Saxon standards and by the 9th century there was a royal mint in the town.

Following the Norman Conquest French people came to live in the town mainly around French and Bugle Streets to the West of Hamwic; the new town and area around prospered. Medieval Southampton grew rapidly and an important port developed, main export was wool and main imports were wines from France and Spain. Weekly markets were held and also a yearly fair to which people from all over the country attended. The town was enclosed by city walls, much of which still visible today, following French raids. There was also an increase in French and Flemish traders from the continent with their new skills and these groups settled in Southampton. Southampton had connections with North America, not just from the sailing of the Mayflower in 1620, but the support for the developing settlements there, and also the fishing off the Newfoundland cod banks which brought prosperity to the town.



Gradually economic decline started and there was a lack of new building until the 19<sup>th</sup>C denoted by the architecture. Prosperity started to return to the town due to the patronage of the Prince of Wales and his three sons arrived to 'take the waters' followed by other nobility. The town emerged as a Georgian Spa town and many enterprising people wasted no time in catering for noble needs in the form of baths, hotels shops, assembly rooms and stagecoach services. Many new building were erected and by 1815 the paddle steamers were offering regular services across the channel. Steam ships and railways enabled trains running between Southampton and London, and scheduled services to overseas destination , including the mail service by 1840.