

English Channel

The English Channel (French: la Manche, "The Sleeve"; German: Ärmelkanal, "Sleeve Channel"; Breton: Mor Breizh, "Sea of Brittany"; Cornish: Mor Bretannek, "British Sea"), also called simply the Channel, is the body of water that separates southern England from northern France, and links the southern part of the North Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. It is the busiest shipping area in the world.

The Marsh villages of Dymchurch, St Marys Bay, Littlestone, Greatstone, Lydd-on-Sea are all on the channel coast, and Dungeness headland on the south part of Romney Marsh protrudes into the channel.

With an area of some 29,000 square miles, the English Channel is the smallest of the shallow seas covering the continental shelf of Europe. From its mouth in the North Atlantic Ocean—an arbitrary limit marked by a line between the Scilly Isles and the Isle of Ushant—its width gradually narrows from 112 miles to a minimum of 21 miles, while its average depth decreases from 400 to 150 feet.



Although the English Channel is a feature of notable scientific interest, especially in regard to tidal movements, its location has given it immense significance over the centuries, as both a route and a barrier during the peopling of Britain and the emergence of the nation-states of modern Europe.

The current English name (in general use since the early 18th century) probably derives from the designation "canal" in Dutch sea atlases of the late 16th century. Earlier names had included Oceanus Britannicus and the British Sea, and the French have regularly used La Manche (in reference to the sleeve-like coastal outline) since the early 17th century.