

Interesting facts about Southampton

1. The Pilgrim Fathers chose Southampton as their point of departure from England and both Mayflower and Speedwell were here in August 1620. Plymouth, in Devon, only became a departure point when the two ships put in there following the Speedwell springing a leak.
2. In the Napoleonic Wars, French prisoners, held in the building that is now the Maritime Museum, carved their names there and these carvings can still be seen.
3. Southampton has the oldest Bowling Green in the world dating from before 1299 and it is still in use. Every August a unique competition takes place there for the Knighthood of the Old Green, the winner being entitled to be called 'Sir' within the club.
4. Southampton's Cenotaph is the 'model' for the Cenotaph in Whitehall, London. Sir Edwin Lutyens took his design for Southampton, simplified it and it became accepted as the design for London.
5. The Ordnance Survey moved to Southampton from London in 1841 following a fire at the Tower of London where they had been based. They have been in Southampton ever since and in 1846 a detailed colour map of the town was produced by the OS, a unique and fascinating reference source for local historians.
6. Southampton was the first local authority in the country to call its offices and town hall a Civic Centre.
7. The long railway tunnel into Southampton Central, from the east, partly follows the line of an intended tunnel for a canal that was never completed.
8. St Michael's Church has the oldest brass lectern in the country dating from around 1350 and which is in the form of an eagle. It was originally the lectern in use at Holy Rood Church and was rescued in 1940 when that church was largely destroyed in the Blitz.
9. In 1554 Philip of Spain arrived in Southampton, stayed 3 days, heard Mass at Holy Rood Church then left in heavy rain with 3000 men on his way to marry Queen Mary at Winchester Cathedral on 25 July.
10. The cockerel on top of St Michael's Church is hollow and, when work is done to the spire of the church, a note is put inside the weathervane.
11. On 1st May each year, May Day is welcomed in by the choir of King Edward VI School singing from the top of the Bargate.

12. The area called The Marlands, on part of which stands Southampton's Civic Centre, is a corruption of Magdalene Fields, once the site of a leper hospital dedicated to St Mary Magdalene.
13. Southampton has a Court Leet that still meets once a year and the Mound, where the Court Leet was held in medieval times, survives on the northern part of Southampton Common. On the day of Court Leet the Sheriff of Southampton takes part in the ceremony of 'Beating The Bounds'.
14. Southampton's Victorian Cemetery on the south west side of Southampton Common is the second oldest such cemetery in the country owned by a Municipal Authority and retains its original buildings from 1846.
15. In 1946, Southampton was the departure point for six voyages of the liner Queen Mary taking 9000 GI Brides and their 4000 children to New York.
16. Southampton had one of the earliest municipal water supplies in the country. In 1420, the town took over a fresh water supply, the pipes for which were originally laid down by Franciscan Friars in 1304. One of the Friars' stone Conduit Houses can still be seen opposite the main entrance to the Mayflower Theatre,
17. Henri Portal, a Huguenot refugee, escaped to Southampton from France and in 1724, in Hampshire, founded Portals, the company that was granted leave to produce paper for Bank of England notes.
18. The Mayor of Southampton is also Admiral of the Port and, in procession, the Silver Oar of Admiralty is carried with other Civic Regalia.
19. In the 15th Century, the Water Gate Tower, at the Town Quay end of the High Street, was leased, at times, at an annual rent of one red rose but the lessee was responsible for repair and maintenance of the tower in time of war.
20. The hymn writer, Isaac Watts, was born in Southampton and educated here at King Edward VI Grammar School then in Winkle Street in the Old Town. His statue is in Watts Park, facing the Civic Centre and, at 8am, 12noon, 4pm and 8pm after the hour has struck from the Civic Centre Clock Tower, there can be heard the opening bars of Watts' hymn 'O God Our Help In Ages Past'.
21. The writer Jane Austen and members of her family lived in Southampton between 1806 and 1809. A new Jane Austen Trail is linked to a series of plaques in the Old Town tracing her associations with Southampton.