

Skibbroen (a pier) and trade



During The Viking Age and The Middle Ages the ships weren't larger than they could sail from the ocean and all the way up to Skibbroen in Ribe. The ships carried cloth, wine and other groceries of luxury from North-Western Europe and building blocks from Dorestad at the Rhine – the so-called tuf blocks which were used to build most of the Cathedral, among other things. It was a lot easier to transport heavy goods like rocks by ship than using an ox cart for transport even for short distances across land.

Horses, corn, pork and fish – and later on also a large number of steers to Holland – were shipped out from Ribe as export goods. Through the years the ships got bigger and they were no longer able to sail all the way up the stream to Ribe. Instead they anchored in The Wadden Sea sheltered by Fanø and Mandø – small islands in the Wadden Sea – this great anchor place was the reason that Ribe continued to be an important seaport and Denmark's gate to the West.

Until several hundred years ago you often distinguished between the words "harbour" and "skibbro" (pier). A harbour was a place for larger ships to anchor in shelter of wind and waves, today we would call that an anchorage.

From the ship anchored in The Wadden Sea you would unload the groceries onto a barge or evert – flat-bottomed ships – and transport the groceries all the way up to Skibbroen.

Consequently Ribe was, during the Reformation in the 16th century, an important seaport with lots of rich merchants who could afford to build big, solid and beautiful houses.

Later on the ships were re-placed by the steamboats that needed lots of coal for the boiler and as a result they couldn't anchor in The Wadden Sea. Subsequently Ribe could no longer be used as a seaport and Esbjerg took over.



Assignments

1. Does "Johanne Dan" weigh more or less than 50 metric tons? Use the notes on your cell phone to get the length and width and multiply. Divide by 2 and you'll have the approx. weight of the ship in metric tons.
2. The water level during the flood in 1911 was 4.41 metres, but during the hurricane in 1999 the water level in The Wadden Sea was 5.15 metres. Why wasn't Ribe flooded this time?
3. Use your computer to create a nice page (with text and pictures) on Skibbroen and its importance then and now.