



# DOCKYARDS

## The Naval Dockyards Society

*Exploring the civil branches of navies and their material culture*

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[navaldockyards.org](http://navaldockyards.org)



**'The Old Crane' by Portsmouth artist John Green (courtesy of the Jack House Gallery).  
It is believed this depicts the 250 ton Arrol Crane in Portsmouth Dockyard  
and a Royal Sovereign Class battleship in dry dock.**

More dockyard pictures by John Green can be viewed on  
<http://www.jackhousegallery.co.uk/the-dockyard-other-places>

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## Notes From The Editor

Welcome to another edition of *Dockyards* and I very much hope you will find some items of interest.

There is good news in this issue from Chatham and Devonport but otherwise despite campaigning, dockyard structures at Portsmouth, Gibraltar and to some extent Pembroke Dock continue to be neglected.

At Sheerness, it was good to hear of the Duke of Kent paying an impromptu visit in April to the Dockyard Church, which is to be restored as a mixed-use centre for local use, as reported in our last issue. The Bluetown Heritage Centre there is also witnessing some expansion. However, the former Military Hospital sadly continues to lie empty and disused. Plans to convert the building into housing, possibly for the homeless, were abandoned in February. This seems to have been down to the £6m cost being considered too expensive.

Good news at Portsmouth is that plans are well advanced and funding is nearly in place to exhibit LCT 7074 outside the D-Day Museum.

Our conference at Greenwich back in March attracted a good attendance of 45: see our report. Subsequently we were pleased to co-opt Paul Brown to the Committee as Secretary. A former university lecturer, Paul has written several books on maritime subjects and indeed contributes to this issue.

I enjoyed recently 'mudlarking' (or to be more precise 'foreshore exploration') on the Thames close to the Millennium Bridge and Queenhithe. Guided two-hour walks are led by the Thames Explorer Trust – see <http://thames-explorer.org.uk/foreshore-walks/>. Highly recommended.

Also on the Thames, NDS member Mary Mills has an interesting booklet out: 'Innovation, Enterprise and Change on the Greenwich Peninsula', which can be obtained from <https://www.greenwich.co.uk/peninsula-book/>

It was good to hear of the take over of Maritime Books ([www.navybooks.com](http://www.navybooks.com)), publishers of *Warship World*, for example) by MCI Media. We thank the departing Steve Bush for his work as editor of *Warship World* for the last eighteen years.

We feature an article on the Macina crane in this issue and this reminded me of the plight of the Armstrong Mitchell crane in the Arsenale in Venice, featured in our December 2016 issue. I understand there has been a great deal of interest but sadly only some initial funding for their worthwhile project – see <https://www.veniceinperil.org/projects/armstrong-mitchell-crane>

Cranes are clearly key dockyard features and working at Newcastle University in close proximity to cranes guru Dr Brian Newman, I am aware of campaigns in the UK, some successful, to preserve historic cranes. An example is the giant cantilever crane at Cowes, Isle of Wight, formerly used in JS White's shipbuilding activities. As we go to press, I understand the section 106 agreement will require full restoration of the crane, which will be the centrepiece of new development. A new amphitheatre will surround the crane and be available for markets and concerts. See <http://cowes-hammerheadcrane.org.uk/>.

(Brian Newman's book *A work of Titans, a history of the Swan Hunter floating cranes* is available at a special price of £13 to NDS members, contact me for details. Discounted from the normal £20.)

In my research for a Masters in post-1945 UK shipbreaking at Newcastle University I have started using extensively the excellent Marine Technology Special Collection – containing inter alia records of leading UK shipbuilders and breakers: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/engineering/about/facilities/marineoffshoresubseatechnology/specialcollection/#about>. Shipbreaking of course has taken place in royal dockyards, notably Rosyth. To facilitate my research I have also been glad to usefully meet Bob Lane, who has been in charge of Disposal and Reserve Ships Organisation ('DRSO') in Portsmouth dockyard for the past twenty years or so.

I always welcome contributions to *Dockyards*, however big or small. I hope to hear from you. Alternatively, pictures and news for our Facebook page.

**Richard Holme** (editor)  
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## Great News from Devonport

A press release of 10 January 2018 confirms long-awaited news that the National Museum for the Royal Navy ('NMRN') will start this year on a £5m project to open a full-time visitor attraction in the Devonport South Yard centred around the nuclear submarine HMS *Courageous*. Our understanding is that the existing museum, the Devonport Naval Heritage Centre, will be moved to Bonaventure House (also known as Officers' Terrace) and be enhanced by the gift noted in the paragraph below. This new facility sounds an excellent concept, also giving public access to a part of the historic South Yard. *Courageous* will be moved to another dock with an adjacent building telling the story of the Royal Navy in the Cold War. This seems to be very much a long-term project, taking seven to ten years.

Shortly afterwards, on 22 January, a government announcement set out a welcome gift to the NMRN of a large number of historic artefacts, already on display to the public at Devonport, but only by appointment. Earl Howe announced:

Devonport Dockyard had a museum known as the Adelaide Gallery in the first half of the 1800s comprising a number of artefacts including figureheads and items such as flags from ships that served at Trafalgar. Sadly a fire in 1840 destroyed the majority of the Collection. However with the help of volunteers the museum was opened within the Naval Base estate, in the disused Old Admiralty Fire Station in April 1969. Since opening the 'Devonport Collection' has been enhanced by a group of willing volunteers who have accumulated artefacts of both local and national significance.

The current collection is made up of over 100,000 artefacts spanning the period 1588 to the present day. The collection includes naval stores, uniforms, medals, badges, personal kit and also model ships. It also includes silver, china and kitchenware, weights and measures as well as larger items such as figureheads. The total cost of the proposed gift is estimated at approximately £650,000.

The expansion of the collection is such that artefacts are now displayed in eight galleries across three buildings and is managed by a group of over thirty dedicated volunteers and uniformed staff. Currently members of the public can only visit the collection by appointment.

Given the changes to the Naval Base site and the wider area under the Plymouth and South West Peninsula deal and the complexities associated with supporting such an extensive collection of historical material I propose the gifting of the Devonport Collection to the NMRN in order that it can be suitably conserved and more widely displayed in Plymouth . . . allowing greater access to the public.

This is very good news but very much a long-term project. Readers may wish to note in the meantime the excellent current Devonport Heritage Centre <https://devonportnhc.wordpress.com/> and their website includes inter alia details of interesting talks they arrange.

**Richard Holme** (with thanks to John Day)

## Grimsby Ice Factory – Endangered!

In March 2018, the magnificent Ice Factory was named by leading European heritage association Europa Nostra as one of the seven most endangered heritage sites in Europe. This illustrious list also includes the centre of Vienna – see <http://www.europanostra.org/europe-7-most-endangered-heritage-sites-2018-announced/>. The Factory was nominated for the list by SAVE Britain's Heritage.

Grimsby developed as a fishing centre from 1852 and by the early 1900s was the leading fishing port in the world, with 700 boats. The Ice Factory played a crucial part in this development and at its peak was producing 1,100 tons of ice daily. The present imposing building was mainly built 1900/01 and 1907/10 with a 1950s extension. The Factory closed in 1990 and were it not for the efforts of local activists would have been demolished shortly afterwards. The fabric has deteriorated and the roof is open and much of the metal inside has been stolen.

After regrettable demolition of the Cosalt buildings in late 2016, the dockside area, the Kasbah, was designated a conservation area in October 2017 although sadly the Ice Factory was not included.

The campaign locally for conservation of this unique building is led by the Great Grimsby Ice Factory Trust – see <http://www.ggift.co.uk/>. There are plans for use of the building for heritage, commercial, cultural and leisure activities but an initial application for £11m funding to the Heritage Lottery Fund has sadly been unsuccessful. The Ice Factory is owned by Associated British Ports (ABP).

The attached pictures show the factory and come courtesy of Andy Marshall/World Monuments Fund.

**Richard Holme**





## Portsmouth Naval Base Heritage at Risk – Doing Nothing Not an Option! One year on . . .

It is now over a year since the Naval Dockyards Society wrote to Second Sea Lord and Deputy Chief of Naval Staff Vice Admiral Jonathan Woodcock OBE and Portsmouth Naval Base Commander Cdre Jeremy Rigby (17 February 2017) about the decayed state of key unused historic structures in Portsmouth Naval Base (Coats, 'Doing Nothing Not an Option! Urgent Remedial Action sought for Portsmouth Dockyard Buildings at Risk', *Dockyards*, vol. 22, no. 1, June 2017).

The NDS argues that Portsmouth Dockyard structures were built with public money by generations of Portsmouth and Gosport craftsmen in predominantly local materials, so that Portsmouth Dockyard could build, repair and supply naval ships. They are therefore public heritage so the local authority and stakeholders such as Historic England should be empowered to take a leading role in their conservation.

The deterioration of the buildings named below is such that their conservation requires both an immediate and a long-term broad-based plan of action. For the named structures to be restored to a useful condition, they should receive more of the operational naval base budget, with a higher level of annual maintenance than at present.

### Our points

1. It is unacceptable for the MoD to state that 'austerity measures will continue to provide challenges for MOD heritage management.' (*MOD Heritage Report 2011–2013*, para. 41, 2014, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/470261/MOD\\_Heritage\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/470261/MOD_Heritage_Report_FINAL.pdf))
2. *DCLG Circular 02/2006. Crown Application of the Planning Acts* (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/7672/150982.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7672/150982.pdf)) stated in Para. 40:  
  
'Under the new provisions, a local planning authority can serve a notice or make an order (other than a court order) intended to enforce compliance on Crown land without having to follow any procedures other than those which are already set out in the planning Acts as being generally applicable. There is no requirement to obtain the assent of the Crown body with the interest in the land . . . before serving the notice or making the order.'  
  
The *Protocol* (Historic England, 2009, para. 8 <https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/protocol-for-the-care-of-the-government-historic-estate/protocol-for-care-of-govt-historic-estate-2017.pdf/>) stated that the Crown must now 'Comply with the statutory procedures that regulate works to heritage assets': 'Crown bodies no longer benefit from immunity from the planning acts.'
3. With Crown immunity thus ostensibly removed, the MoD should comply with planning statutes. Doing nothing is no longer an option.
4. The crucial route is for new and appropriate uses to be found for these buildings, so that operational budgets also finance conservation. This is the best way to secure their conservation and future. With the disposal of HMS Nelson Wardroom announced by Defence Minister Mark Lancaster in January 2016, the former Royal Naval Academy and The Parade are logical replacements, their refurbishment meeting naval ethos, conservation and operational requirements.
5. We called for a MoD Conservation Group or a Heritage Partnership Agreement with the MoD.
6. **We proposed priority actions for eight nominated structures at risk:**
  1. 2 to 8, The Parade: Urgent remedial work and discussion of a thoroughgoing refurbishment programme for operational MoD re-use
  2. Former Royal Naval Academy: Urgent remedial work and of a thoroughgoing refurbishment programme for operational MoD re-use
  3. Iron and Brass Foundry: Urgent remedial work and discussion of operational MoD re-use
  4. No. 6 Dock, Basin No. 1: Needs surveying for a sustainable conservation programme
  5. No. 25 Store, Yard Services Manager's Office: Needs surveying for an operational MoD re-use

6. Portsmouth Pay Office: Needs an urgent survey for possible inclusion in the HAR
7. Portsmouth Block Mills: Needs surveying for a MoD meantime use
8. Surviving railway track: Needs surveying, designating and conserving

The naval base buildings and structures which were the focus of our concern (Primary List) and listed in the Historic England *Heritage at Risk Register South East*, 2016 remain on the 2017 list, pp. 65–6 (<https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/har-2017-registers/se-har-register2017.pdf/>).

1. 2–8, The Parade, HM Naval Base, Portsmouth (Buildings 1/125–131, Grade II\*) ‘Condition: Poor’; ‘Priority category: Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric; no solution agreed.’; ‘Partially converted to office use c1995, but now empty. Prone to wet rot and some structural movement. A repairs schedule promised by May 2009 has not been circulated. Background heating has been introduced, reducing damp levels. However, problems persist with detailing between the main building and the rear extensions.’ This is unchanged.
2. Former Royal Naval Academy, College Road (Buildings 1/14 and 1/116–9, Grade II\*) ‘Condition: Poor’; ‘Priority category: ‘Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric; no solution agreed.’; ‘Natural ventilation has been introduced, reducing damp levels. Background heating was installed during winter months, however there are still signs of water ingress. Recent remedial works have reduced water ingress and the dry rot appears to be dying back.’ This is substantially unchanged.
3. Iron and Brass Foundry, Victoria Road, HM Naval Base, the east wing (Gunnery Gear Store and Pattern Shop, Building 1/136, Grade II\*) ‘Condition: Fair’; ‘Priority category: Slow decay; no solution agreed’; ‘The east wing (Building 1/136) remains unused and at risk. There are concerns over water ingress.’ This is unchanged.
4. No. 6 Dock, Basin No. 1, Portsmouth Dockyard (SM 397 Grade I) ‘Condition: Poor’; ‘Priority cat-



Above: 2–8 The Parade (1715–19).  
Above left: The former Royal Naval Academy (1730–34).  
Left: Refurbishment plans at the National Archives (Work 41,1905).

egory: Slow decay; no solution agreed.’; ‘The dock is suffering from rotation, and mortar joints on the stonework altars on the north side have opened up.’ This is unchanged.

5. No. 25 Store, Yard Services Manager’s Office, Jago Road, HM Naval Base, Portsmouth (Building 1/118, Grade II\*) ‘Condition: Poor’; ‘Priority category: Slow decay; no solution agreed’; ‘In poor condition and vacant. Future use uncertain.’ This has worsened from Fair to Poor.

Our Supplementary List of structures which are identified as needing action (but not on the Historic England Heritage At Risk Register):

6. Portsmouth Pay Office, College Road (Grade II, 1808) is suffering damage to the brickwork from rain ingress where the bomb-damaged first storey was removed in 1941 and the new brickwork meets old brickwork in the north elevation. (Coats et al., *Twentieth Century Dockyards*, 2015, 119)
7. Portsmouth Block Mills, Main Road (Grade I, 1802) have had no re-use since their comprehensive restoration in 2008, partly because of their location within the operational naval base, but also because the external iron staircases were removed from the southern elevation, thus limiting access to the upper floors. Without daily use and ventilation, the fumes from the underground reservoir are building up to an unpleasant level. (Ibid., 146–8)
8. Surviving railway track which is sparse and scattered needs surveying and conserving (Ibid., 171–3)



**The Portsmouth Block Mills (1802).**

### **What has been the result?**

Responses to the February 2017 NDS letter:

**Portsmouth News 7 March 2017: ‘MOD must back Base’s Heritage’** (front page and 3 inside pages print version and online 7 March 2017: <https://www.portsmouth.co.uk/our-region/portsmouth/action-is-needed-to-save-historic-portsmouth-naval-base-buildings-from-rotting-1-7853533>)

‘Dr. Ann Coats, chair of the Naval Dockyards Society, has written to the Ministry of Defence to call for remedial action to conserve and re-use these key Buildings at Risk within Portsmouth Naval Base. She proposes a MoD Conservation Group or Heritage Partnership Agreement to take on responsibility for restoring them – a move which is likely to attract considerable public endorsement.’

### **Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust 11 March 2017:**

‘The Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust fully supports this proposal and would be happy to play its part in ensuring these nationally important buildings are properly conserved and brought to new life by appropriate new uses.’

### **MoD/Defence Infrastructure Organisation**

Government Approved Contractor acting as Conservation Lead for DIO's Historic Estate at Portsmouth (BAE) 21 February 2017:

'We do have Conservation Management Plans and Condition Survey reports detailing the condition and proposed remediation to bring these building back up to prime condition. Conservation programme is continually updated to include latest information with regular input from Historic England and Portsmouth City Councils' Local Planning Authority, Conservation Planners.'

### **Vice Admiral Jonathan Woodcock 27 February 2017:**

'We are looking at how best to optimise our estate and where possible to bring historic buildings back into use, the Old Naval Academy is an example where I expect to see future investment.'

### **Chief Operating Officer, Ministry of Defence (Sutton Coldfield)/Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) 19 April 2017:**

'We . . . value your collaboration in seeking the best outcomes for the naval heritage estate and . . . will be in contact to continue this dialogue.'

SAVE Britain's Heritage made contact, interested in the former Royal Naval Academy becoming available for non-MoD residential or hotel development. However, the MoD will not allow this. The explosive potential ('arc of fire') of the new aircraft carriers means that civilians may not sleep within Portsmouth Dockyard, which prevents such developments within the dockyard boundary.

### **Subsequent NDS actions**

On 13 October 2017, the NDS participated in an important seminar, *Sustainable Regeneration of Former Defence Sites*, initiated by Dr Celia Clark and organised by the Royal Town Planning Institute South East and Hampshire Preservation Buildings Trust, at Bursledon Brickworks Museum.

This seminar was informed that that Local Planning Authorities cannot serve repairs notices or other enforcement notices on the MoD. This contradicts the following government policy and statement:

Para. 6. 'MoD has formally adopted the DCMS Protocol for the Care of the Government Historic Estate (2003)':

'Removal of Crown Immunity from Planning Acts in 2006. MoD now compliant with planning procedures. Scheduled Monument Consent still obtained as outlined within DCLG Circular 02/06.'

(MoD, 2007, Heritage Report 2005–2007, p. 12,

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/33361/heritage\\_rpt\\_200507.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/33361/heritage_rpt_200507.pdf))

The NDS immediately took up this matter with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Industrial Heritage. We proposed government actions to improve the MoD's maintenance of its historic buildings, namely:

- Enforce the power of Local Planning Authorities to serve repairs notices or other enforcement notices on the MoD, following the removal of Crown Immunity from Planning Acts in 2006;
- Direct the MoD to set up a MoD Conservation Group or a Heritage Partnership Agreement to resolve future investment for remediation and management by receiving more of the operational naval base budget, with a higher level of annual maintenance than at present.

To date there has been no reply.

### **Next steps**

1. Urge the Second Sea Lord and Deputy Chief of Naval Staff and Portsmouth Naval Base Commander to arrange site meetings with Historic England, Portsmouth MPs, councillors, LPA officers; external stakeholders such as Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust and ex-dockyard personnel to identify the priority issues, options and solutions.
2. Write again to the relevant MPs.



The NDS understands that the MoD is planning to refurbish the Former Naval Academy for re-use as a naval wardroom. This is excellent news, but we have no official confirmation as yet and the process could take at least five years. An agreed programme to start Step 1 is required now.

**Dr Ann Coats** FRHistS, Chair Naval Dockyards Society  
**avcoatsndschair@gmail.com**

Co-author, *20th Century Naval Dockyards: Devonport and Portsmouth Characterisation Report*  
(Historic England, 2015) <http://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/twentieth-century-naval-dockyards-devonport-portsmouth-characterisation-report/>

All picture credits A. Coats

## Gibraltar Update

Dave Eveson reports two slightly disturbing developments. No. 4 Dock was built c. 1895 as part of the dockyard expansion but has now been covered by a new Post Office parcel and sorting department, only a single storey at present. At least though the Dock has survived underneath, which may not have been the case if earlier plans for an underground car park there, had come to fruition.

Close to No. 4 Dock is the former Royal Navy headquarters building, HMS *Rooke*, handed over to the Gibraltar government in October 2016 after a seventy-year history. The 1970s buildings on this site are now being demolished.



**HMS *Rooke*.**

## ‘Powerful Tides – 400 Years of Chatham and the Sea’

I discovered this amazing exhibition of art almost by chance while passing the Smithery in Chatham Historic Dockyard in March. It only runs to 17 June so try to get along!

2018 marks the four hundredth anniversary of the Dockyard at Chatham moving to its present location. The Dockyard have announced a ‘Festival 400’ with this being one of many items, the best for me anyway!

Alex Patterson, visitor experience manager, has been working on the project for a year and comments:

The same families had been working here for generations. When it finally closed in 1984, it tore the heart out of the town, and left a legacy of bitterness. This exhibition is about celebrating its history, the creativity it has inspired, and rebuilding those relationships with the town and region.

The earliest image in the exhibition is a seventeenth-century view on loan from the British Library showing a fortified dockyard with houses outside its walls. There are paintings by artists as diverse



Some images from the exhibition which was curated by Jean Wainwright.

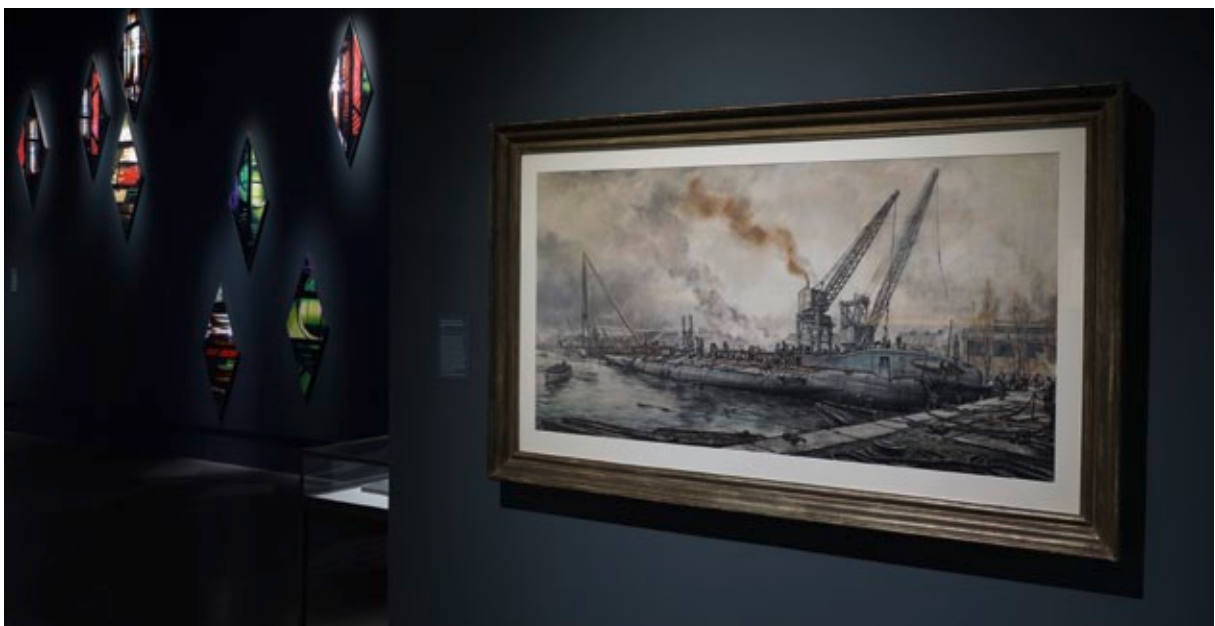
Top left: A View of the Dockyard from the River c. 1860s  
(British School, Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust Collection).

Top right: HM Submarine R1 off Sheerness (1920)  
(Norman Wilkinson, Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust Collection)

Above left: Victory at Trafalgar Sketch, JWM Turner (Tate)

Above right: The Launch of HMS Agamemnon (1879) (Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust Collection).

Below: General view including the dockyard picture by Bone 1943. (Daniel Turner)



as John Constable, J. M. W. Turner, Tracy Emin, Norman Wilkinson and Eric Ravilious, depicting the dockyard or ships or scenes associated with it. My own favourite is a study for *The Fighting Temeraire (launched Chatham 1798)* by Turner, a puff of cloud where the ship is in the final famous picture! A more down to earth but excellent scene is of a busy Chatham dockyard by Muirhead Bone in 1943 with the submarine HMS *Tradewind* under construction. (*Tradewind* was to torpedo the Japanese *Junyo Maru* on 18 September 1944, tragically killing 5,620 Allied and friendly prisoners of war.) Besides paintings there are diaries and manuscripts.

Richard Holme

## Docklands History Group, New Researches Seminar

This was a new venture hosted by the Docklands History Group ('DHG') on 25 November 2017 and proved a worthwhile seminar. Our venue – the Jack Petchey Room in the basement of the former sugar warehouse beside West India Quay, now part of the Museum of London Docklands – accommodated only about thirty. In the event, NDS member, and DHG Chairman, Edward Sargent, welcomed us. He explained that Hannah Stockton, a postgraduate student at Queen Mary University and the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (NMM), had agreed to lead a small group of postgraduate students (plus one post-doc) and put together an interesting programme of eight 25-minute papers (all but one illustrated). The aim of this novel seminar was to encourage young researchers – both the presenters themselves, and audience members.

The speakers were from a variety of institutions: Cambridge University, NMM, Birkbeck, Leicester University, University College London, and Bristol University. They represented a wide age range, and it was especially encouraging that the second speaker, Michael Barram, pointedly introduced himself as having started his PhD studies in his seventies! He went on to tell us of 'The "Zinc Oxide" Strike in the London Docks in 1948'. This industrial dispute initially concerned a demand for an increase in wages for handling 'dirty' cargo, immobilized ships in London Docks, and affected over 19,000 men. It quickly escalated, involving other Unions, leading to the Prime Minister Clement Attlee's broadcast appeal, and then the Declaration of a State of Emergency.

That paper was in the First Session: **Law and Disorder**. The opening speaker, Callum Easton, had already told us that the London Sailors' Strike of 1768, which had begun in the north-east of England in the collier trade, can be said to be the first ever 'strike'. Docklands emerged from this paper as liminal places; and sailors as amphibious creatures, who formed a community set apart by dress, speech and, even, gait. The third fascinating paper in this session, given by Anna McKay, was on convict prison hulks, particularly those moored in the Thames off Woolwich, which captured the public imagination, and, of course, gave rise to literary representations by Charles Dickens.

Although most papers concerned cultural history aspects of the merchant navy, Catherine Beck's – in the Second Session: **Networks and Organisations** – looked at 'Shipwrights, patronage and the Thames Royal Dockyards 1740–1815'. Broader connections to the rest of the UK were significant, and patronage networks show that the Royal Naval Dockyards were far from disconnected from the merchant yards. Especially during mobilization periods such as the 1790s (after the Nootka Crisis) the navy incentivised those who had served apprenticeships in merchant yards to join Navy Yards. Guy Collender then told us about 'The creation of the Port of London Authority in 1909 . . .'. A major factor leading to the appointment of a Royal Commission, which reported on far too widely dispersed powers, followed by a lengthy legislative process, seems to have been lack of adequate dredging in the Thames. Dr Oliver Dunn, whose work forms part of the wide-ranging Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Science ('Campop') project, spoke on 'London's coastal shipping networks during the age of sail, 1650–1830'. Researching several sources such as port books, customs and tolls data, and crew lists, his team is building up intriguing databases.

In the final, third session, **The Cultural Thames**, Jack Avery gave us 'Poetics of the shipyard'. The poems quoted were from the period of the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, and of the subsequent Anglo-Dutch Wars. Some were eroticised, some used brawny language, and others were satirical! Shipyards became a key component of the Restoration myth of Charles II's sexual appetites. To round off the day, Hannah Stockton, who had organized the seminar, addressed 'Marketing

the Thames: Leisure and the River in the long eighteenth century'. She described the 'picturesque', plus new locations for leisure and 'tourism' on the Thames, where souvenirs were available. It seems that dirt, poverty and hard labour were intentionally overlooked; although tours had echoes in contemporary diary and journal writings – recording the 'forest of ships' masts'. This perhaps expresses British Military and Imperial success – and brings me back to *Naval Dockyards*.

I enjoyed a good Seminar, in a new format which I hope will be repeated. For further information on DHG events please visit their website at [www.docklandshistorygroup.org.uk](http://www.docklandshistorygroup.org.uk)

Jane Bowden-Dan

## Hidden Secrets of Chatham Dockyard and its defences

The Historic Dockyard Trust at Chatham launched a new initiative in autumn 2017. Billed as 'the first Annual Chatham Historic Dockyard Conference', a one-day free event was held on Friday 24 November 2017 in the Dockyard Church, by kind agreement of the University of Kent. Speakers and presentations explored the context of Chatham Dockyard and its physical protection, surroundings and history. The event brought together new and revealing research by groups and individuals across the local region in a digestible manner.

Refreshment and arrival formalities were located in the Commissioner's House, where various local history groups and researchers mounted table-top displays of their work. A sandwich lunch for the ninety or so attendees meant a busy period when all the displays were viewed and more specific questions discussed.

Given the wide remit of the event's title, a wide range of papers were presented to Conference. The morning focused on the Chatham defences and life of Medway towns whereas the afternoon gave attention to the Dockyard and Rochester Bridge. The main papers were on 'Understanding Upnor Castle: The Elizabethan and Tudor Dockyard', 'Significance of Fort Amherst: The Dockyard at the heart of industry and seapower' and 'Relevant Medway Archives Rochester Bridge 1793/1815'.

I particularly enjoyed this event to learn more details about Upnor Castle and how it has evolved over the centuries; to understand the significance of Fort Amherst in the Dockyard's protection; and to be aware of the extensive range of other researchers and groups all focused on Chatham Dockyard. Looking forward very much to the Second Annual Chatham Historic Dockyard Conference!

Clive Stanley, Chatham Dockyard Historical Society

**Note by editor** – the 2018 Conference is scheduled for 11 and 12 September. Details can be obtained from Alexandra Curson, [acurson@cdht.org.uk](mailto:acurson@cdht.org.uk)



Dr Martin Watts answering questions following his paper – *Chatham Dockyard at the Heart of Industry and Seapower*.  
Photograph © Alexandra Curson, CHDT



Q & A session with (left to right) Prof. David Ormrod, Keith Gulvin (face hidden) and Richard Holdsworth CHDT  
Photograph © Alexandra Curson, CHDT



## **Nelson's Dockyard – A Visit**

On the island of Antigua in the Leeward Islands is 'Nelson's Dockyard'. At our conferences we have heard of the need for a facility in the West Indies as the colonial powers struggled for supremacy and there was a need to move cargoes and to inhibit trade by the American states.

English Harbour was important to secure Britain's interest and the site selected was a refuge from hurricanes and with deep water. It was possible to repair and victual ships continually in the Caribbean. It was first used as far back as 1671 and construction of a proper dockyard started in 1725 when a slipway was made. More work continued when the use of slaves was introduced in 1749 with major expansion between 1774 and 1792. Nelson was commander of the station between 1784 and 1787 and the islanders are proud of this association.

With steamships and waning interest in the area the Dockyard saw less use and was closed in 1889. It was opened to the public in 1961 and is now a World Heritage Site. The area is compact and contains a number of immaculately restored buildings, some like the bakery are even used for their original purpose. Private yachts and larger vessels can moor there. Three of the buildings have been converted to luxury hotels with restaurants and bars. Others are shops and offices.

There is a well-marked and explained circuit for visitors to follow and the 'Admiral's House', which was in fact a storehouse, has an excellent museum and displays numerous artefacts found on site, displays of tools and many photographs. One floor is dedicated to Nelson. There are some handsome ship models and a 'mock-up' of a cabin with details on board ship in the eighteenth century.

The area is surrounded by wooded cliffs which add to its charm. Numerous fortifications on headlands have been preserved and there are impressive rows of cannons at these places.

The Dockyard is open daily and valued for its contribution to the island's economy. There are very frequent buses taking about half an hour from the West Bus Station in St Johns city centre for about 65p single which go to the main entrance.

I could not help thinking if only Sheerness could be preserved in this way but the climate is rather different! One feels very close to history albeit in a sanitised form but the conditions of life at the yard are well documented.

A most worthwhile, informative and delightful visit. See details attached of a planned NDS visit to Antigua in May 2019.

**Jonathan Fryer**, March 2018

## **Royal Naval Ordnance Depot, Upnor**

Upnor Castle, on the River Medway in Kent, was built between 1559 and 1567 to the designs of the military engineer Sir Richard Lee. Its original purpose was to defend the Medway anchorage where the ships of Queen Elizabeth's navy was increasingly being concentrated. The river anchorage offered greater protection than Portsmouth, which was considered vulnerable to French attack due to its exposure to the English Channel.

Upon its completion the castle, with its modest establishment of one master gunner and six gunners, was put under the jurisdiction of the Lord High Admiral's local representative, who was the Officer in Charge at the newly established naval dockyard at Chatham.

By the 1580s fear of invasion from France had been replaced by fear of invasion from Spain. The Medway was vulnerable to raids mounted from the Spanish-controlled ports in the Low Countries and when war eventually broke out with Spain in 1585 a chain was stretched across the river below Upnor Castle at St Mary's Creek. The chain was secured at one end to a set of piles on St Mary's Island and was operated by two large wheels housed on a pier-head at Upnor. The chain remained raised to prevent enemy shipping entering the river to attack the fleet assembled there. It could be lowered to the river-bed to allow the passage of friendly vessels attempting to make the journey up-river but only after they had been met, challenged and inspected by teams of armed seamen posted aboard naval pinnaces based on the river.

By the 1620s the dockyard at Chatham had had moved to a larger site to the north of the Tudor



**Aerial view of Upnor Castle with the 1719 barracks house to the left and the ordnance depot river wall to the right. Note the lettering on the wall warning ships not to 'ANCHOR OPPOSITE' in case of any accidental explosions at the depot.**

yard. It rapidly expanded with the building of a new quay, cranes, workshops, a dry dock and officers' accommodation. The new dockyard still relied on Upnor Castle for its defence. However this reliance was found to be seriously misplaced during the second Anglo-Dutch War in 1667, when the Dutch fleet sailed up the Medway, broke the chain across the river below Upnor and attacked the English fleet. The castle's obsolete guns lacked the range to bring the Dutch ships under effective fire. A hastily constructed new eight-gun battery was established near the castle, which prevented the Dutch advancing any further up-river but not before they had caused severe damage to the English fleet and seized and carried off its flagship the *Royal Charles* back to Holland as a prize.

The humiliation of the Dutch raid led to a revision of the Medway's defences with new fortifications being built further down-river which made the batteries at Upnor redundant. In 1668 the castle was ordered to be converted into 'a Place of Stores and Magazine'. Changes were made to the castle to adapt it for its new role which involved the heightening of the main building and the removal of the gun platform from its roof. A laboratory was also established in the South Tower while other parts of the castle were made to serve as a cooperage and a shifting house whilst a Storekeeper's House was built in the castle's grounds. In 1691 a survey reported that the castle held 5,206 barrels of gunpowder, more even than the Tower of London, which was only holding 3,692 barrels. As well as the powder, the castle was storing 164 iron guns, 62 standing carriages, 100 ships' carriages, 7,125 round shot, four matchlock muskets, 200 snaphaunce muskets and 77 pikes.

After the dockyard moved, the old Tudor yard was taken over by the Board of Ordnance which converted the site into a gun wharf, building new large storehouses for the storage of guns and ordnance. The Board also took over the powder magazine at Upnor Castle and concern about its security prompted the construction of a barracks to the south-west of the castle. Completed in 1719 it housed two officers and sixty-four men and was the first purpose-built barracks in the Chatham area.

By 1778 the magazine's establishment included a governor, storekeeper, clerk of the cheque, master gunner and twelve gunners. The latter was responsible for the security of the magazine.

The work at Upnor revolved around the movement of the navy's warships on the river. When a vessel arrived in the Lower Medway, officers from Chatham Dockyard would go on board and remove the ship's powder. It was then transported to Upnor where it was sifted, coopered into new barrels and stored in the magazine. It would also be tested in the laboratory and its condition reported to the Ordnance Board. When ships were ready to sail out again barrels of powder were loaded from the castle onto lighters for transport out to them.

By the early 1800s concern was being voiced about the safety of the residents of the village that had become established near the castle, in the event of an explosion at the magazine. In 1808 a decision was taken build a new magazine on land to the north of the castle to hold 10,000 barrels of gunpowder. The site was quarried out of a rocky hillside to provide natural traverses. 3,500 barrels continued to be stored in the castle but by 1827 these had all been moved and the castle was then fully fitted out as an Ordnance Laboratory.

The poor performance of the Ordnance Board during the Crimean War saw its eventual abolition and most of its duties transferred to the War Office. It also brought the inadequacies of storage provision on the Upnor site to a head, a situation compounded by the fact that filled shells could not be kept in the same magazine as gunpowder: shells were carried through the Laboratory, where gunpowder was being examined and filled into cartridges, and then hoisted twenty feet into an adjacent chamber. In 1856 the decision was made to build a new shell store and magazine, the latter with a capacity of 23,000 barrels. These were completed in 1857 and an additional shell store was built in 1860–61. However, by this time the expansion of the Royal Navy in general and Chatham Dockyard and its defences in particular had further increased the demands on the Upnor Depot so

**'B' Magazine now converted  
into office accommodation.**



**The Filled Mine Store (now a  
café) and the Filled Shell Store  
(now office accommodation).**

**From left to right: Fuze &  
Tube Store; Mine Testing Room  
and the Wet Gun Cotton Store.**







**Aerial view of the Lower Ordnance Depot from 2016.**

**Structures visible: on the left the Filled Mine Store and the Filled Shell Store; in the centre are the remains of the Ordnance Pier Network and on the right is 'B' Magazine.**

**Ordnance Pier Network about 1920. In the background on the opposite side of the river is the Victorian Extension of Chatham Dockyard on St Mary's Island.**



in 1871 a report by the Inspector-General of Fortifications recommended a new magazine be built to serve the Medway District.

In 1875 the building of a new magazine enclosure at nearby Chattenden was completed. This new site was linked to the Upnor depot by a railway which enabled munitions to be transported from the Chattenden magazine enclosure for loading onto lighters from Upnor's piers. In 1891 the Upnor depot was transferred to the Admiralty, a new Naval Armament Supply Department was formed, and the depot continued to expand along the Medway with new storage facilities for wet and dry guncotton completed in 1896 and shell filling facilities in 1907. The castle itself was still used for various



purposes including the use of the bastion and courtyard as proofyards. However, the castle gradually became treated more as a museum and with the end of the Second World War, during which it still served as part of the Magazine Establishment, it finally became recognized as such. Since 1961 the castle has been maintained as a national monument and is now run by English Heritage.

The Lower Upnor Depot, as it became to be known, continued in use by the Admiralty until 1961 when, as a result of cuts outlined in the 1957 Defence White Paper, the Navy's Nore Command was abolished. The armaments depots at Lower Upnor, Chattenden and Lodge Hill were closed. The army took over the three sites for the use of the Royal Engineers and the Royal School of Military Engineering (RSME) at Chatham. Chattenden and Lodge Hill were used as training areas whilst Lower Upnor was used for storage. The army maintained all three sites into the twenty-first century.

In 2013 Lower Upnor Depot was put up for sale and has since undergone redevelopment into residential and office accommodation but, thankfully, many of the old depot buildings were retained, refurbished and incorporated into the new development.

© Clive Holden – December 2017

## **The Role of Naval Bases in Maritime Operations in the Mediterranean During the Eighteenth Century**

We had a very successful annual conference on 24 March with forty-two attending and enjoying a varied and most interesting day in the pleasant surroundings of the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich. A full report will appear in *Transactions* in due course so here follows a short account, highlighting only one or two of the many issues covered in each presentation:

Jane Bowden-Dan opened proceedings with a great talk on victualling Nelson's navy during the French wars, focusing on the Catalan Bay of Rosas. 'Old Weevil' (Deptford) was the centre of the navy's victualling operations and Gibraltar in the Med. By Nelson's time, fresh fruit and vegetables were bought locally in the Mediterranean. We heard of ships being equipped with fishing tackle, not used very often it seems but the sick bay had priority for the catch. The normal ration of a daily gallon of beer was replaced by wine fortified for preservation by brandy. The degree of self interest in the navy wanting an efficient fighting crew and therefore providing a good diet.

Gareth Cole from Loughborough University had researched personnel records of Ordnance Yards and highlighted interestingly the careers of various personnel as they moved between yards and roles as they were promoted or posted on. He also explained how widow's pensions (usually £25/



**The speakers at the conference. From left to right: Catherine Scheybeler, Ian Stafford, Jane Bowden-Dan, Philip MacDougall, Jim Humberstone, Gareth Cole.**



**The Battle of Navarino, 1827.**

year) were paid, where the deceased had had at least ten years' service. Records also showed the considerable amount of ordnance carried by transports, they might take up to twenty working days to unload. Or did this reflect a degree of inefficiency!

We then had a novel presentation by Jim Humberstone, highlighting movements of Nelson's fleet over thousands of miles between 4 May and 2 August 1798, the latter of course being the date of the battle of Aboukir Bay or Nile. The presentation was novel as it relied almost entirely on the use of interesting maps and one chronology to explain and summarise matters. Very interesting.

After an excellent lunch with plenty of networking opportunities, Philip MacDougall gave one of his customarily good talks on the naval dockyard of Istanbul and its role in the failed attempt to thwart Greek independence 1770/1827. This was perhaps a new topic to many in the audience. Philip carefully considered many myths about the Turkish navy and exploded many of them, particularly the point that it was technically deficient. There was an interesting question at the end on the relative merits of stone and iron cannonballs!

Ian Stafford focused on the naval base of Lissa in the Adriatic 1808/1814, a topic on which little research had hitherto been made or indeed mention made in histories. Initially just a source of fresh water it grew considerably and apart from one short period when the navy lost control, its operation was significant in terms of disrupting military operations on the nearby shoreline.

Finally I was sorry to miss Catherine Scheybeler's talk on Spain's eighteenth-century naval base at Cartagena. I gather her paper interestingly explored the relationship between naval strategy and the modernisation of naval infrastructure.

**Richard Holme**

## **Peter the Great – His Visit to Portsmouth Dockyard**

In March 1698 the Russian tsar, Peter the Great, visited Portsmouth dockyard as part of a European tour which included a four-month stay in England, the first visit of a Russian tsar to the country. The chief purpose of his visit was the study of English shipbuilding to help inform his project to create a modern Russian navy. He would have seen the 3rd Rate *Nassau* under construction at Portsmouth and, as a guest of King William III, he reviewed the fleet there, and also visited Deptford dockyard. He is said to have studied and passed a course in shipbuilding whilst in England, having already studied shipbuilding and worked incognito as a carpenter for four months at the Dutch East India Company's shipyard in Amsterdam. Peter was not satisfied with the knowledge he gained in Amsterdam because the Dutch school of shipbuilding relied heavily on practical experience rather than precise theoretical knowledge and calculations. The knowledge and secrets of the craft were passed

down from father to son, and to use this method of building in Russia would be impossible, as Russia did not have generations of shipwrights and riggers. To learn a more structured science Peter proceeded to England, a country known for its more precise, formalised approach to designing and building ships. When, in April 1698, Peter finally started on his homeward journey, he did so in a royal yacht based on a 6th Rate frigate, the *Royal Transport*, built at Chatham and presented to him by William III. The tsar put his newly acquired expertise in shipbuilding to good use. At Olonetsk shipyard on the Svir on 24 March 1703, he laid the keel of the frigate *Shtandart*, the first ship in his new Baltic fleet. On the tercentenary of Peter's visit to Portsmouth dockyard, in 1998, a plaque to commemorate the event was laid fifty yards to the west of the *Victory*.

My picture shows a statue of Peter the Great at Kronstadt ('crown town' in German), on Kotlin Island, 30 km west of Saint Petersburg near the head of the Gulf of Finland. Peter founded and developed Kronstadt as the base of the Imperial Russian Baltic Fleet and, heavily fortified, it guarded the approaches to Saint Petersburg. Construction of the dockyard and naval base began in 1719. The Obvodny or Circular Canal with a dockyard basin was dug out and slipways were erected around it, and work on the first dry dock, the Peter Dock, was started, though it was not completed until 1752.

**Dr Paul Brown** (adapted from his forthcoming book *The Portsmouth Dockyard Story*, to be published by The History Press, July 2018).



## Save the Commodore at Pembroke Dock!

### 1. Campaign and Plans

The Captain Superintendent's Residence, in its heyday known as Admiralty House, just inside the gates of the former Royal Dockyard Pembroke has had, over recent decades, a very sad history. Following its abandonment as a hotel and restaurant and a succession of mystery fires, this Grade II\* listed building makes a rather depressing sight for those who drive past it on the way to or from the Irish ferry terminal at Pembroke Port.

When the property came up for auction in December 2017, a group of residents and others with a life-long affinity for the town decided to seize this unexpected opportunity to acquire the place for the community of Pembroke Dock.

As it happened, the building was withdrawn from the auction and this gave the group – 'Save the Commodore' – more time to formulate a plan for the future of the house.



**The entrance to Pembroke Dockyard, c.1900 and today.**

The broad aims of the project are:

*By means of an Historic Buildings Trust, acquire and renovate the former Captain Superintendent's Residence at Pembroke Dockyard, along with its former garden, transforming this currently derelict Grade II\* listed building and its setting into a self-supporting community asset.*

As we see it at the moment, there will be two phases where we will engage the local community.

### **Renovation phase**

Whilst undergoing renovations, the building could be used as a 'live' practical study example of the methods and skills used in the restoration and investigation of a real example of built heritage. There would be, of course, considerable health and safety challenges that would need to be met.

Seek partnerships with the organisations in the non-exhaustive list below:

- Pembrokeshire College (Pembs Coll.) – Explore the possibilities of using the site as a training resource for students who are studying within the heritage, building renovation, leisure, media, computing/virtual reality and/or renewable energy sectors.
- Construction Industry Training Board – Training grants and advice. Tap into any plans that MHPA might have or the CITB for their new centre in Swansea Bay.
- Milford Haven Port Authority (MHPA) – Guidance and advice. Allowing acquisition of the portion of the garden of the former Captain Superintendent's Residence that is now their property.
- Ysgol Henry Tudor (YHT) – An educational resource for exploring the heritage of Pembroke Dock.
- Dyfed Archaeological Trust (DAT) – Archaeological excavation training dig of garden area and analysis and recording of the standing remains of the Commodore and other buildings within the Yard. The latter would be in negotiation with other agencies operating in the dockyard. Community archaeological projects can attract HLF grants.

The archaeology of the site is potentially very interesting as the garden was formed over the upper limit of a tidal inlet that formerly served the house of Paterchurch and was likely to have been one of the factors for the selection of this site for the building of the medieval house.

- West Wales Maritime Heritage Trust (WWMHT) – Mutual support in furthering the study of the maritime history of this piece of coast line.
- Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC) – Guidance and advice.
- Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) – SPAB runs working weekends where volunteers learn new built heritage renovation skills. They also fund 'fellowships' where young practitioners of the skills associated with the renovation of old buildings are able to further enhance their skills. One such fellow has recently been helping with the restoration of a seveneenth-century cottage near Castlemartin.
- CADW – Guidance and advice, with possible grant support for the renovation of this Grade II\* listed building.
- Pembroke Dock Town Council (PDTC) – Promoting the heritage of Pembroke Dock.
- Owner of Paterchurch – A tower remaining from the medieval house called Paterchurch – 250 metres west of The Commodore.
- Pembroke Dock Heritage Centre – 300 metres east of The Commodore
- WWMHT – Working to establish these sites as complementary heritage attractions in Pembroke Dock.

### **Post-Renovation phase**

The movement that started as Save the Commodore will now be known as 'The Commodore Trust' – a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). The vision is that this building should always be the focus of a community led project that will provide leisure, employment and educational opportunities to the residents of Pembroke Dock and its hinterland.

Any use of the renovated building would need to be considered carefully, but imagination and vision should be the order of the day. It should be possible to work in close consort with the Heritage Centre, West Wales Maritime Heritage Trust and other heritage focused businesses and property



owners to put together an 'offer' that would enable Pembroke Dock to be a cohesive heritage/arts tourist destination. The Captain Superintendent's Residence provides, along with the Heritage Centre and other significant nearby buildings, an opportunity to tap into potential of the ever-increasing holiday traffic (and occupants) that literally passes the front door of these premises.

- **Hotel, restaurant and wedding venue**

This would need to involve partnership with Pembrokeshire College and Ysgol Henry Tudor. This use of the building is an obvious one, but to be successful it would have to find a niche in the market that focused on the undoubtedly positive heritage attributes of the site. In this guise it could provide a practical arena for the training of young people in Hospitality and Catering. The buildings provide much scope for this type of business, with a rejuvenated garden providing potential for seasonal marquee-based events.

- **Recording Studio/Music Practice Rooms/Dance Studios**

This would provide a resource that does not seem to exist locally. Whether the building could be successfully adapted to such uses without compromising its historical value would need to be carefully examined. Dependent upon the damage to the interior of the building, it may be appropriate to drop a steel framework 'box' into parts of the shell to provide modern facilities. This has been successfully achieved at the Chatham Historic Dockyard, where art/museum galleries have been installed within the shell of an old dockyard building.

- **Art Gallery/Presentation gallery/pop-up cinema**

Some parts of the rear ranges of the building could be adapted internally for such uses. The cinema would be small scale and show films, say once a month initially. Again, links with Pembrokeshire College would be useful.

Any galleries could also be used to showcase the renewable energy initiatives promised for the Haven and Pembroke Dock.

- **Traditional Building Skills**

The long range of the former stable block at the rear of the house might also be used as workshops for the training of traditional craftsmen in such skills as building with stone and lime, metal work and carpentry/joinery.

Once The Commodore Trust has become a 'legal entity', then the real work can begin to restore this once prestigious building to its former glory. The next few months promise to be interesting times!

There are some things that readers might be able to help us with. Firstly, we are very short of photographs and information about the interior of the building when it was in use. Also, we have failed to trace the freeholder of the property, an Australian lady by the name of Patricia Jane Wood. Any information about this lady, who seems to have had a clear emotional connection to the place, would be welcome.

Website [www.SavetheCommodore.org.uk](http://www.SavetheCommodore.org.uk)

Facebook Group: **Save the Commodore.**

**Adrian James**

## **2. History**

Architect Edward Holl (d. 1823) planned a house for the civilian Master of the Pembroke/Pater yard as early as 1817–18; but this was not built until the Navy Board was combined with the Admiralty Board in 1832, and then to a different plan (although based on Holl's original design for No. 1 The Terrace) to form a symmetrical composition. The first Captain-Superintendent was appointed in 1832. A date of 1834 was said to have been found on a long removed wooden porch. After its construction, and during its life, the building was known as 'Admiralty House'.

Pembroke Dockyard closed in 1926. Its closure caused much local hardship. This was partly alleviated when the RAF took up residence from 1931. Admiralty House then became a sergeants' mess. In turn, the RAF flying boat squadrons left 'PD' for good in 1957. Eventually the building became the Commodore Club and latterly the Port Hotel. The property was acquired in 2013 by a Nigerian businessman, with planning permission for renovation as a boutique hotel, with blocks of flats and townhouses to be built on part of the old gardens.



**Photographs**  
**© Richard Lawrence**

The building was listed on 18 January 1974, amended 18 February 1994 to Grade II\*, as part of an important late Georgian formal group at the Dockyard. Unfortunately, the building was listed as The Port Hotel (formerly listed as The Commodore Club), a title that fails to match its once historical importance and the role of its original occupants. The building is still known to locals as The Commodore, hence the use of this name in The Commodore Trust and Save the Commodore.

To bring the more illustrious aspects of Admiralty House's history to a modern audience is one of the aims of the group.

### **The Exterior**

1832–4 house built for the Captain-Superintendent of the Royal Dockyard, designed to match No. 1, The Terrace, opposite and east. It was constructed of tooled squared limestone with hipped slate roof and two stone ridge stacks. The basement and three-storey four-window range was complete with cornice and low parapet. Also fitted was a surrounding plinth and first-floor sill band. Upper windows were one 12-pane sash, two casement pairs and one blind recess; first floor had 12-pane sashes, with one inserted window between first two, and ground floor has recessed arched openings, three small-paned windows and twentieth-century door with fanlight in third bay. Three-window end walls, those on east wall above lodge (listed separately) are mostly blind with one 12-pane sash, those on west wall including exposed basement storey make a four-storey elevation, with arched openings to former ground floor. Fenestration has been variously altered. Three storey south/west service-wings constructed of rubble stone with square stone for upper floor and south end stack.

The Stable Range: Long rubble stone two-storey stable range attached to the service wing. Three ridge stacks and various 12-pane sash windows over some nine bays, stable entry was towards right end, with loft over. A coach house, added after 1858, is in short west return with big ashlar arch facing north and two 12-pane sashes over. Previously the coach-house was in the south gable end.

### **The Interiors**

Mostly altered and now completely lost due to fires and weather damage. Some plain plasterwork in north/west ground floor room lasted. No apparent evidence of the structural ironwork used in the

earlier Nos 1–3 The Terrace. Two major fires occurred on the 8 August 2006 resulting in the loss of the main roof and 16 December 2014, resulting in additional internal major damage. The main roof, timbers, slates and lead were rebuilt May to October 2008 funded in part by the Townscape Heritage Initiative. Subsequently, this new roof has again been badly vandalized and had all its lead removed.

**John Gibbs**

## The Macina Malta – From Mast Crane To Hotel

Philip de Lange's extant mast crane, *Mastekranen*, built in 1746 for Frederik V at the Royal Naval Shipyard at Holmen, Copenhagen, evokes memories of the *Macina* (derived from the Italian *macchina* – machine) at Senglea Malta where there is a unique remnant of forgotten industrial heritage.

As sailing ships grew in size, masts could only be installed, repaired or removed by specialized masting sheers: wooden masts or spars held together with tarred ropes, and supported vertically (thus 'sheer') on a hulk, a ship that had seen better days. For increased stability the sheers was often erected in harbour on a wharf; the lower end of the sheers was set apart to form an 'A', which rested on a grooved platform. The pulling force of sheers and load was absorbed by a wooden tower, often enclosed in stone, as in the baroque *Mastekranen* at Copenhagen, to protect the wood from the elements.

During masting, ship and mast were floated beneath the sheers that was swung out at an angle from the quay; hand (later engine) operated capstans or winches turned the ropes (later replaced by chains) that lifted the mast for fitting amidships in the hull. At Senglea the sheers was erected above an ad hoc demi-bastion within the fortifications in the Galley Port, later Dockyard Creek. By the end of the nineteenth century, powerful quay and floating cranes made static sheers obsolete; only a few complete sheers exist, but mastless examples such as the Macina can be found in former naval establishments.

The Macina was in service by 1629. Galley masts and spars were stored in warehouses on Store Wharf, to the left of the building, close to the timber yards at the head of Burmola Creek. The timbers of the sheers wore out over time and needed to be replaced. In *The Maltese-Hospitaller Sailing Ship Squadron 1701–1798*, Anton Quintano says that the Commission of Sailing Ships repaired the Macina in 1709, and private sailing ships were allowed to use the sheers against payment. There were sheers for smaller vessels in front of the church of St Theresa, across the water from the Macina.

A watercolour by Charles Frederick de Broctorff shows Store Wharf and the Macina in 1838.

In 1840 the old Macina timbers were replaced. Timber has a very short lifespan in Malta, no doubt owing to the extremities of the weather. It was during this decade that the first photographs were taken on the island. As a result, the esoteric activities of the Admiralty, generally poorly documented compared to that of the Order, could at least be gleaned from photographs. The Macina was renamed Sheer Bastion by the British, and the two appellations were used concurrently. Conrad Thake has made a fortuitous discovery of a photograph of the wooden Macina. To the left of the sheers is Store Wharf and part of its colonnade. On the right are excavations for the building of new stores and the dockyard main gate. The new sheers is huge; like the one it replaced, it rests on top of the bastion, and is supported by several thick guy ropes, chains, pulleys and ladders. The Royal Arms have been installed above the gate overlooking the wharf.



In 1864, the sheers were replaced with iron beams. Cast iron had already been used elsewhere, for example, both in the naval bakery and in civilian structures such as the Valletta food market. The new sheers were supported by secondary beams on the roof; the base of the main frame rested on two specially built, hinged, masonry knuckles built halfway up the bastion wall, on either side of the arched apertures overlooking the creek.

The erection of the new iron sheers at Malta was described and illustrated in the following year by *The Illustrated London News*.



The operation of setting up a very large pair of iron sheers, which have been constructed in the steam factory of Her Majesty's dockyard at Malta, has just been successfully performed. Our illustration, from a sketch by Mr. James Kiddle, master of HMS *Royal Oak*, will give an idea of this large piece of mechanism. The use of these sheers, as most of our readers know, is to enable heavy weights to be raised and put on board ship, or to be lifted from the ship and put on shore. The new sheers at Malta are built of plate iron three eighths to half inch in thickness; the legs have an average thickness of 2 feet six inches square, and are 25 feet apart, their length being 113 feet. The weight of the whole is 25 tons, and they are capable of lifting forty tons. They have replaced the wooden ones erected in 1840, which showed symptoms of decay, and were not considered safe to lift heavy weights. The deterioration of the iron ones can at any time be tested, and the weak part strengthened.

We may justly consider this another triumph of iron over wood. After giving the manufacturers all credit for this excelled specimen of their workmanship, we must commend the skilful and sea-men like manner in which the Master Attendant's department effected the task of shipping and raising them into their place. They were built in a shed near the factory on blocks of wood two feet in length. When completed, planks were placed on the space they were intended to travel, two skids, made of pine logs, forty feet in length, were placed under the sheers, and, the blocks on which they were built, having been removed by the use of tackle and a capstan from a lighter, they were easily transported across three lighters, floated under the old sheers, and slung with chains to the centre connection. The capstan were hove round, and the new sheers were gradually raised into their intended position where for many years they will remain a monument to the memory of the gallant and energetic Admiral who now superintends the dockyard at Malta.

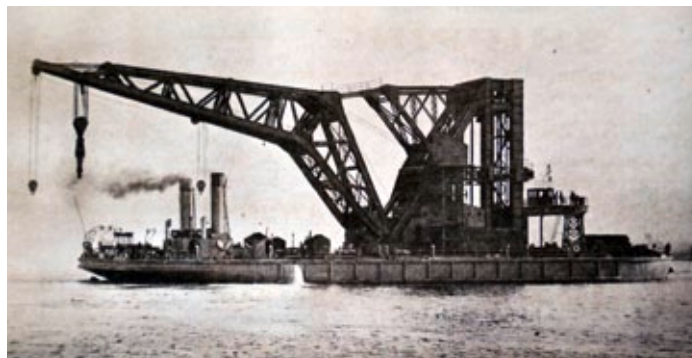
With the new sheers in place, the wooden ones were removed from the roof. Additional iron extensions on the roof reduced the need for support ropes and chains, although heavy cables were attached from the top of the sheers to iron rings at the rear of the bastion. A horizontal beam strengthened the 'A' frame. The new sheers had a very short working life. By the time of its erection, part of the Dockyard was in the process of moving to French Creek, which was linked to Dockyard Creek by two tunnels. Work on a new graving dock in French Creek began the following year. It was completed as No. 3, the Somerset Dock in 1871. The new Armstrong Mitchell 160-ton Hydraulic Crane erected on Somerset Wharf in 1885–86 made the Macina redundant; period photographs confirm it as a 'dead' structure retracted towards the bastion so as not to obstruct shipping in the creek. This made the sheers higher and even more of a harbour landmark.

The Macina and its environs were put to different uses. A signalling station was set up on the roof and the buildings from the Main Gate to Sheer Bastion were largely taken over by the Dockyard Police (the force later became the Admiralty Constabulary). Here were cells, dormitories, a yard, and search rooms. In the guard house by the water's edge was the surgery. This was where naval dockyard law was enforced, and where doctors and nurses attended to injuries sustained at the workplace. There were offices for the King's Harbour Master and Pilots, for applications for marriage allowances and pensions, for foremen, chargemen, submariners and boatswains. It was a place that evoked mixed feelings amongst the men: necessary, useful, but which left no doubt as to who was in charge.



In his testimony on the troubles of 7 June 1919, Mr J. Hamilton, president of the Imperial Government Workers Union at the Dockyard, alluded to the general discontent that led to the men's participation in the riots. On that day the rumour mill encouraged the men to go to Valletta to protest, and there were posters and graffiti with similar messages on the walls. The men were irked at the high cost of living, higher wages paid to expatriates for equal work, and discrimination in the award of work bonuses. The four thousand-strong workforce of 1914 quadrupled during the conflict; in 1919 the number was down to 2,500. Some 1,500 were readmitted after the Admiralty had a rethink and sent more ships to the yard. The changed role of the Macina from mast crane to meeting place was highlighted by Karmenu Ellul Galea in *I-Istorja tat-Tarzna* (1973); the Macina no longer had an industrial function, but was where the one aired grievances and got medical attention.

Like the Macina, the hydraulic crane in French Creek was immobile; ships or lighters had to be moved to the crane for lifting heavy loads. The situation was remedied in 1926 with the commissioning of Admiralty Floating Crane Lighter No.4, also known as *C.L.IV* or 'Clive'. It was built in 1916 by Armstrong Whitworth on the Tyne to a design by Cowans, Sheldon of Carlisle. In 1916 its 250-ton lifting capacity made it the largest self-propelled float-



ing crane in the world. With a working radius of 100 feet and a height of 77 feet above the waterline, it gave the Admiralty unparalleled flexibility and reach throughout the harbour. A special berth was laid for it in French Creek next to Senglea Point. The crane soon became the latest harbour landmark in the inter-war years. Photographs of the air attack on HMS *Illustrious* in 1941 show the huge jib enveloped in clouds of smoke. It was sunk at its Boiler Wharf berth on the night of 4–5 March 1942.

By this time, not only was there no further use for the sheers but the iron had probably deteriorated and there was no appetite for expensive maintenance or renovation. *C.L.IV* could quite easily remove the sheers and transport it to the wharf for demolition. However, for reasons that are unclear, the sheers was simply let go into the waters of the creek. There is no record of what happened afterwards; one can only assume it was either lifted by *C.L.IV* or the beams were pulled to the wharf, lifted by shore crane and broken up in sections. What would have been a humdrum crane lift was turned into an exciting, dramatic, if wet, public spectacle. Daily life at the Cottonera was governed by the *balomba*, the powerful Dockyard siren, that signalled ('wailed' is closer to the truth), the phases of the working day. On the afternoon of 27 February 1927, the siren announced the imminent demolition of the Macina, a warning to keep clear. The back supports were removed, leaving just the 'A' frame; the pins were removed from the hinged ends; there was a high turnout to witness the once in a lifetime event. The event was reported by the *Daily Malta Chronicle*:

The huge crane jutting on the Dockyard Creek, high above the Officers' landing place near the Yard's Main Gate, was demolished in the presence of the Admiral Superintendent, high officials of the Yard and officers of the Fleet, as well as a large number of spectators. The ponderous crane, said to be a hundred years old, plunged into the sea with terrific force, breaking into two and raising at the impact, a wave fully thirty five feet high, spraying both sides of the buildings thereon, hundreds of feet away. The crane remained embedded in the mud, a portion of the huge structure jutting out of the water by several feet.

After the war the area around the Macina went into decline, not least owing to extensive bombing damage. The Admiralty, no doubt aware of the impending rundown of the military base, erected temporary Nissen huts and nondescript buildings. The Maltese government endeavoured to find uses for various buildings that were ceded by the military. On 5 April 1971 the Malta flag was raised on two *Swift* Class inshore patrol boats at Sheer Bastion, the base of the newly formed Maritime Troop. In July of that year the Troop was designated as the 1st Maritime Battery, Malta Land Force (Armed Forces of Malta in 1973). The men left Sheer Bastion for Hay Wharf on 18 October 1977.

As the tenure of the military base drew to a close, a new ring road was built at Senglea and Birgu. The Macina was altered to provide road access into Senglea Wharf. On 22 February 1980, the Malta Labour Party moved headquarters from Marsa to the Macina. For the next fifteen years, the Macina became synonymous with the party. The Macina symbolized the Admiralty, and Mr Mintoff's tussles over the transfer of the Dockyard to Bailey (Malta) Ltd.

After the Malta Labour Party moved to Hamrun in 1995, the Macina lay derelict for some years; various uses were suggested until 2009 when it became the focal point of the maritime festival organized by Senglea Local Council. A minuscule sheers was erected on top of the bastion as a reminder of the original Macina. The building continued to be loaned to the Council for the annual festival. In 2013 an agreement was reached with Port Cottonera Consortium to convert the place into a conference centre with catering facilities. In 2015 nothing came of a proposal for a floating barge and extension to the yacht marina. In 2016 the Macina was leased to Von der Heyden Group for conversion into a boutique hotel with twenty-one luxury suites; it is to be marketed as Cugo' Gran Macina.

The harbour ferry sails into Dockyard Creek, past Fort St Angelo, Cottonera Waterfront, Birgu and Senglea. Dead slow, hardly any wash, to protect the yachts at the pontoons, there is time for flights of fancy, perchance to dream of other times and ages; there is the guard house, relic of the Dockyard Main Gate, now used as a residence. The cast-iron hinges on the masonry plinth of the Macina are still there. The ferry berths at Bormla, opposite the galley warehouses on Store Wharf, with the *nave* names on the lintel. Centuries of history for an inexpensive ten-minute ferry ride.

**Michael Cassar** 2017 (an abridged version of articles that appeared in the *Sunday Times* of Malta 31 December 2017 and 7 January 2018) [mikscas@gmail.com](mailto:mikscas@gmail.com)

The author would like to thank Conrad Thake and Anton Quintano for their kind assistance.

**Editor's note** – as noted above the remaining structure of the Macina is now a boutique hotel – see <http://www.cugogranmalta.com/en>

## **Luckiest Sailor Passes Away! RIP Chris Peacey (1934–2018)**

A World War II Naval veteran who called himself 'the luckiest sailor alive' has died in his home town of Gosport near Portsmouth.

Joining the Royal Navy as war was declared, Chris Peacey was sent to the battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* (41,000 tons) being built at Birkenhead. She was completed on 31 March 1941 – and was soon in action. Within two months and with sixteen-year-old Chris onboard as a junior seaman she was chasing the German battleship *Bismark* in the North Atlantic and was damaged by her in the subsequent fight. Other warships went on to sink the *Bismark* in May 1941. *Prince of Wales* then took Churchill to the USA for talks with Roosevelt and in the autumn escorted vital convoys to Malta before leaving the Clyde for Singapore on 25 October. It was to be a one-way voyage.

### **Lucky escape one . . .**

With Christmas on the horizon as the battleship arrived in Singapore the Japanese invaded nearby Malaya – on the same day they attacked the US Fleet at Pearl Harbor . . . After less than a week in harbour HMS *Prince of Wales* sailed from Singapore on 8 December 1941 – without any air cover. She was soon spotted by a Japanese submarine and aircraft off the coast of Malaya. They wasted no time, attacking with wave after wave of Japanese aircraft. The ship and the battlecruiser *Repulse* were soon sunk by airborne torpedoes. As his ship sank 327 men went down with her including her captain but seventeen-year-old Chris Peacey was able to swim away from his sinking ship. He was rescued by British destroyers that arrived to help and was soon back in Singapore naval base after less than a week at sea.

Returning to UK Chris spent much of the rest of the war serving in landing craft which took part in the landings in North Africa, Sicily, Anzio, Normandy and Malaya returning home unscathed.

### **Lucky escape two . . .**

Just ten years after being sunk off Singapore, Chris had qualified in Gosport as a submariner and in the spring of 1951 joined the submarine *Affray*. As luck would have it . . . on Friday 13 April that year- Chris had a motorbike accident at Bursledon near Southampton and broke his arm. He spent the weekend being patched up by the medics and when *Affray* sailed on the Monday after the weekend Chris Peacey was *not* onboard. The boat sailed for routine exercises in the Channel with a full crew and a class of trainees too. She was never seen again, taking seventy-five sailors to a watery grave. *Affray* was found after weeks of searching in deep water off the Channel Islands but mystery still surrounds what really happened on that April day.

Chris, counting his blessings after the *Affray* disaster, went on to serve in other ships and submarines to complete his naval career as a Chief Petty Officer. This included time in the Dartmouth Training Squadron instructing young officers during their earliest days about the modern Royal Navy. Few friends (myself included) knew of his lucky escapes. On leaving the navy he went on to serve as a civilian at HMS *Centurion* in Gosport until retirement. He lost his young daughter in a road traffic accident whilst in the navy and his wife Beryl predeceased him.

He was the only *Prince of Wales* veteran to witness the naming of the new aircraft carrier of the same name in Rosyth last September. Pictured below his cap tally from the battleship, picture by Bob Lane.

**Mike Critchley**

### **Tallow and Dreadnoughts . . .**

After the launch of a dreadnought (seen in the background) at Portsmouth local watermen scramble to collect the tallow which had eased the ship's progress down the ways. An illustration from Paul Brown's forthcoming book *The Portsmouth Dockyard Story*, to be published by The History Press in July 2018. (Photo courtesy of Portsmouth Royal Dockyard Historical Trust)



### **Book Review:**

***WRNS The Women's Royal Naval Service* by Neil R. Storey  
Bloomsbury Shire, Oxford, 63 pages**

Shire books are not academic works. This one has no citations for instance, but it does have a longer list of reading than one would expect. In producing this work the author extends his two other works in the series dealing with women in other war areas.

Studies relating to women are usually of doubtful validity because women do not necessarily function as a group within a larger context, but the Wrens warrant a separate consideration from

the (male) Royal Navy because they were a separate organization. Storey's work primarily deals with the organization and not the individuals within it. In this respect the work is extremely good: it condenses quite a lot about the organization into the short book. It gives surprisingly detailed but relevant accounts of certain aspects of the organization even though in the space it hits only the headlines. It does not argue any thesis, save that it attributes the six nurses in the Naval Base at Therapia during the Anglo-Russian war and the Admiralty's fear that National Service would take women away from naval areas, as antecedents giving rise to the Women's Royal Naval Service. The author proffers snippets of information such as details of their uniforms; that the first overseas posting was to Gibraltar and (surprisingly) to Genoa; the divisions by 'trades' and the length of training and that during the Great War the number of Wrens reached a peak of 438 officers and 5,054 ratings. His information on that war and the early years of the Service is perhaps better than later only for the fact that there is much more to say about the Second World War as both it and the service were larger and cannot be proportionately accommodated in a work of this size.

Being only 63 pages, with a number of photographs of Wrens at work, it is easily read in a short time. If one assumes that NDS readers would be versed in the information contained within it, it may not be of great value – except that there is shortage of in-print books on the Wrens. [*The WRNS: A History of the Women's Royal Naval Service* by Marjorie H. Fletcher (Naval Institute Press, 1989) is only 160 pages: 'The WRNS in Wartime: The Women's Royal Naval Service 1917–1945' (International Library of War Studies) 24 2017, by Hannah Roberts is in print at £74.] So perhaps the book for all its brevity fits into a market gap.

The reader coming afresh would be challenged to remember in one reading all the facts presented in this condensed book.

Reviewed by **Ian F. S. Stafford**

## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

### **22 September 2018**

Bucklers Hard and Beaulieu River, Hampshire – a very special visit has been arranged for members. Provisional timetable is an exclusive walking tour of Bucklers Hard led by the director on Bucklers Hard Maritime Museum. There is then time to visit the Museum, leaving the afternoon free for a packed lunch and river cruise.

### **17 to 24 May 2019**

Proposed trip to Antigua.

### **30 March 2019**

Naval Dockyards Society Conference Saturday 30 March 2019 at the National Maritime Museum Greenwich: "We stand on guard for thee"\* Dockyards and Naval Bases in North America & the Caribbean'

### **Spring 2020** (date to be agreed)

Working conference title – 'Indian Ocean dockyards.'

### **Spring 2021** (date to be agreed)

Portsmouth based international conference.

\* The chorus of 'O Canada', Canadian national anthem, written 1880. Its sentiment could represent that of any naval base for its territory.

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