



# DOCKYARDS

## The Naval Dockyards Society

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

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



**HMS *Illustrious* at the Captain Cook Graving Dock in March 1945. (See the story on page 2.)**

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## Captain Cook Graving Dock

The Captain Cook Graving Dock at Sydney's Garden Island has been designated a National Engineering Landmark by Engineers Australia. The first ship to use the dock was the carrier HMS *Illustrious* in March 1945, see image on page 1 (courtesy Royal Australian Navy). The tug to the right is thought to be *Lindfield*. The opening of the dock was a welcome relief to the Allies as following the fall of Singapore in 1942, the nearest large dry docks were in South Africa.

**Richard Holme**

## Excellent news on Sheerness Dockyard Church

The repair of the Dockyard Church at Sheerness, which commenced in late 2020, is due for completion before this year is out.

Having lain roofless following the disastrous fire of 2001 that gutted it for the second time in its history, the church was transferred to the newly formed Sheerness Dockyard Preservation Trust (SDPT) by the Spitalfields Trust in 2015 following a Compulsory Purchase Order served on the then owner, a private developer, by Swale Borough Council.

The five years it took to commence repairs were not idly spent. The huge task of raising £8.5m, carrying out urgent works to stabilise the tower and the body of the church, appointing the consultants and achieving planning permission and listed building consent was achieved by the SDPT, a newly formed charity operating on a shoestring, backed up by our superb Project Manager Simon Hawkins. None of this would have been possible without the wonderful support of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, which provided a £4.75m grant towards the development and delivery of the project. Match funding was secured from a range of charitable trusts and individuals.

The contract for the repair was given to Coniston, a local contractor based in Dartford, and work started in November 2020 with a completion date in June 2022. Extra work, especially to the stonework where further structural issues were discovered on close inspection once the scaffolding went up, and the problems of Covid mean that Coniston has been granted an extension of time which has put completion back to September 2022.

The rebuilding of the tower with its new balustrading, restored clock faces and new clock mechanism is due to be completed in March, enabling much of the scaffolding to come down and so display the front of the church for the first time in eighteen months.



**Left: Looking  
from Naval  
Terrace to  
the Church,  
April 2022.**



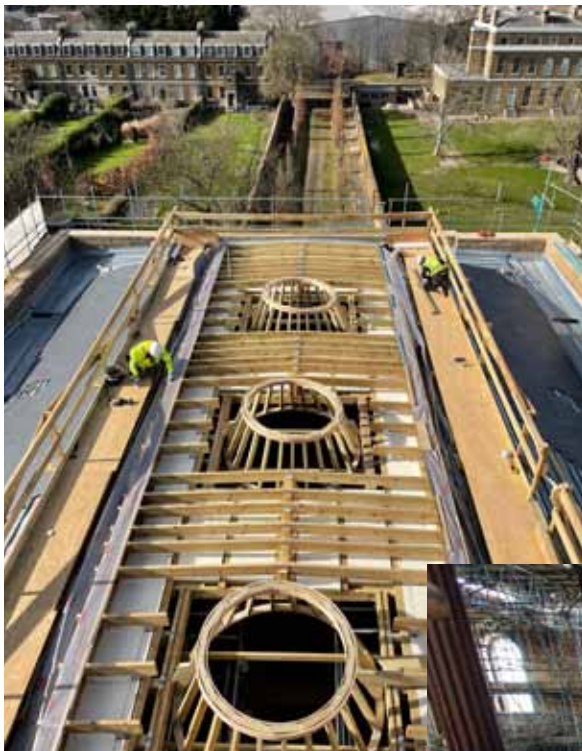
**Right:  
The Church  
April 2022.**





**Left: The cleaned and decorated cast iron gallery support columns inserted after the 1880s fire. October 2021. (Hugh Broughton Architects)**

**Right: The reconstituted balustraded parapet to the tower. This is the only part of the stonework repairs to use reconstituted stone. Elsewhere sandstone from quarries in Yorkshire and Northumberland has been used, with a small amount of Portland limestone, all to match original stonework. February 2022. (Hugh Broughton Architects)**



**Left: New roof in progress showing the framework for the large skylights, looking from the tower with the Superintendent's House to the right and Dockyard Terrace to the left in the distance. February 2022. (Hugh Broughton Architects)**

**Right: Internal structural scaffolding framework. February 2021. (Toby Roney)**





**Above: The repair work to the salvaged weathervane. December 2021.  
(Paul Dennis Metalworks)**



**Right: The new roof framing and skylights looking towards the tower. February 2022.  
(Hugh Broughton Architects)**

Whilst the huge task of rebuilding the tower may well go unnoticed – it is after all identical to the original (although the eagle-eyed will notice a balustraded parapet, missing since the 1880s fire) – the reinstatement of the parapets to the body of the church, most certainly will not. The parapets, now in place, were lost during the repairs following the 1880s fire and were a vital part of the original design. Their rebuilding was a firm commitment by the trustees from day one.

The main roof is all but finished so the remaining scaffolding should be down before summer. After that the vast majority of the work will be the finishing works to the building internally, such as the mechanical and electrical installations, floor finishes, insertion of the gallery floor, balustrading, staircases and decorations.

After fitting out works, which are separate to Coniston's contract, we feel the church will be up and running in spring 2023. It will operate as both a youth enterprise business innovation centre and a visitor attraction, housing sections of the wonderful near two-hundred-year-old Dockyard Model. The SDPT has teamed up with Amelix, a Kent-based company that combines youth education and entrepreneurship with a coffee business. Amelix are the perfect fit and will manage the building for the SDPT, supervising the youth enterprise project and running the large cafe which will be central to the idea of a building open free of charge to the public.

We have had support from both Swale Council, the local planning authority, and Historic England all along and have involved them with the evolution of design before and during the works, where, for example, Amelix persuaded us that a much larger kitchen than originally planned was essential for the success of the building.

The restored Dockyard Church will play a key role in linking historic Blue Town with Sheerness and improving day to day life in both towns and the Isle of Sheppey as a whole.

**Andrew Byrne**



## Notes from the editor – May 2022 *Dockyards*

Welcome to our *Dockyards* newsletter. As life starts to return to normal, we very much hope our readers are able to enjoy life somewhat more.

Good news from Sheerness is that a study is to be done on the conservation of the Grade I listed Boat Store. This is being funded by the port owners, Peel Ports, Historic England and the local Swale Borough Council and will cost nearly £12,000. This has been a long time coming, but the Society welcomes this important development.

### **Latest News – Condition survey carried out on historic Boat Store in Sheerness ([swale.gov.uk](http://swale.gov.uk))**

Not such good news from another neglected dockyard building, this time at Pembroke Dock where we were disturbed to reports of the garden of the Commodore Hotel (former Captain Superintendent's House) being concreted over and a lean to shed being erected against it.

At Portsmouth, our Conservation sub-committee are looking closely at new plans for the conversion of the former Royal Marines Museum at Eastney to a luxury hotel. The sub-committee will also be keeping an eye on Tipner West, where it seems the Council have stepped back for the time being from development plans.

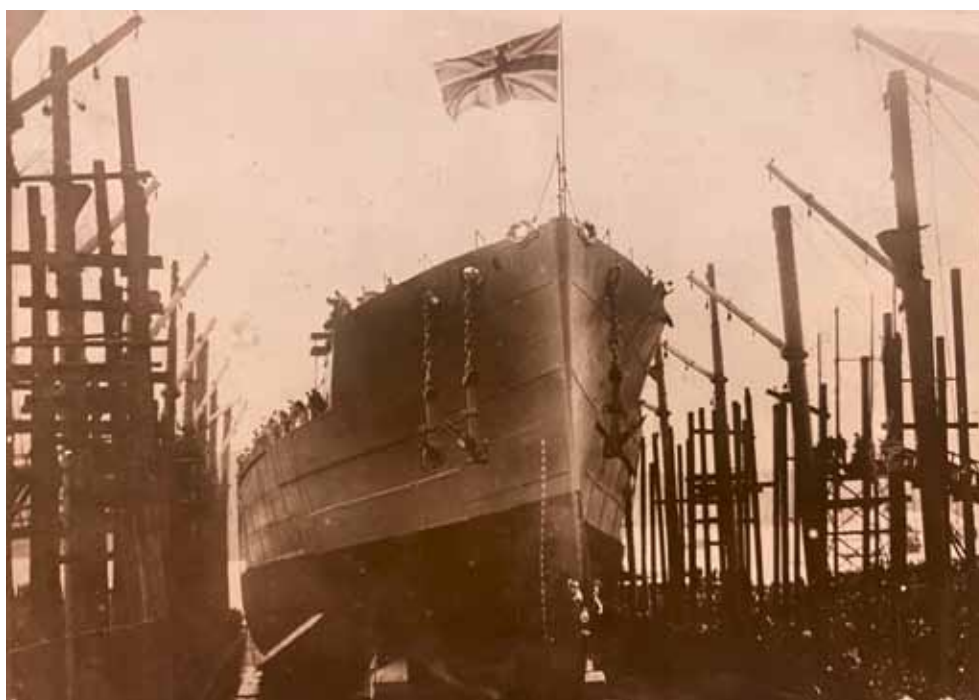
We are sad to report the death of eminent Maltese maritime historian Joseph Muscat, the 'grandad of Maltese Maritime History' according to the *Times of Malta*. Appreciation: Joseph Muscat: the 'grandad' of Maltese maritime history ([timesofmalta.com](http://timesofmalta.com))

It was good to see the double issue of *Transactions* being issued to members recently, all credit to Nicholas Blake for his excellent work as editor here.

Bookings are coming in steadily for our June conference at Portsmouth and our Chair reminds us of the excellent content of this, elsewhere in this issue. Get your booking in soon!

I have devised a one-hour slide presentation on 'Lost naval dockyards of Kent' (Chatham, Sheerness, Deptford and Woolwich in case you wondered!) and have given it successfully to attendances of 70-plus at each of two civic societies so far. If you know any group, who might like this, please let me know.

I have been researching the history of HMS *Warspite* in Cornwall. The last battleship to be built at Devonport Dockyard (see image below of launch, November 1913), she was wrecked on her way to the breakers in April 1947. Refloated in 1950 in an amazing feat of salvage, she was moved to



R. Holme collection

nearby Marazion for final break up. Shipbreaking has always been an area of interest for me and I am fortunate to be cataloguing the ship-breaking files in the superb Marine Technology Special Collection at Newcastle University – **Browse our Collections – University Library – Newcastle University (ncl.ac.uk)**. One aspect is the recycling of ships' timbers for furniture and in our next issue we will feature an article on this. Pictured right is Castle's former HQ at Millbank, London. They were a leader in this area.

All change on the committee.

- Ian Stafford has replaced Paul Brown as Secretary. Many thanks to Paul for years of hard work. He has assured me though that he will continue his excellent articles for *Dockyards*.
- Roger Bendall is taking over from me as Facebook manager and will bring some excellent new ideas to this. Now living in Sydney, Australia, Roger's family have a strong background of working in dockyards and he runs the interesting Facebook page on Bermuda dockyard: **The Historic Royal Naval Dockyard Bermuda, personal and family stories. I Facebook**.
- Finally, after nine years at the helm, I have resigned from my post as editor of *Dockyards*. I have felt tremendously privileged to have fulfilled this role and have enjoyed it thoroughly. Many thanks to all the contributors over the years. Let me know or Ian Stafford ([i.stafford1@virginmedia.com](mailto:i.stafford1@virginmedia.com)) if you'd like to take over.

Many thanks as ever to Nicholas Blake for his help in putting this edition together.

**Richard Holme ([richardholme8@gmail.com](mailto:richardholme8@gmail.com))**

## **Naval Dockyards Society 26th Annual Conference: *Dockyards as nodes of naval architecture, maritime traditions and cultural heritage***

**National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth, 9–11 June 2022.**

At last, after a gap of two years, a 'proper conference' will be held by the NDS in the National Museum of the Royal Navy Auditorium, Boathouse No. 6, Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. Building on our experience of the last two well-attended online conferences, we have again booked Sync-Skills to manage the hybrid facility, so that anyone who is unable (or would prefer not) to sit in a conference environment or who is overseas can also attend online. We have devised a wide range of price options to suit any preference. The two conference dinners will allow delegates to mingle freely and dine excellently in unrivalled venues. It is also a great opportunity to see new Portsmouth Historic Dockyard exhibitions.

This three-day hybrid international conference will present seven speakers and question sessions each day, with optional specialist behind-the-scenes archive, ship, dockyard and harbour tours in the



MTSC Newcastle University

afternoons of 9 and 10 June. When finalised these will include the Admiralty Library Naval Historical Branch Reading Room – Georgian Dockyard Walking Tour – Boathouse 4 – Harbour Tour – HMS *Warrior* – HMS *Victory* – some free, others chargeable. The conference is sponsored by the Society for Nautical Research.

### **Day 1. Building a warship, 9 June 2022**

Clare Hunt: HMS *Trincomalee*: Design, Construction and Modification, 1812–1900

Prof. Emeritus David Bradley: HMS *Unicorn*: Sir Robert Seppings, the Industrial Revolution and Developments in Warship Design

Dr Ian Buxton MBE: Supplying Machinery for Dockyard-built Warships

Brian Lavery: Shipbuilding in Shoreham in the 1690s: Benjamin Furzer – a One-Man Naval Base

Commander Martin R. Marks OBE, BSc (Eng): Design, Deploy, Decline and Dwindling – the story of the VIC (WW2 Victualling Inshore Craft)

David Griffiths: Building a Coastal Motor Boat for the 21st Century

#### **KEYNOTE Speaker**

Dr Antony Firth MCIfA: Placing Warships: Reconnecting vessels and dockyards

### **Day 2. Dockyards as heritage, 10 June 2022**

Dr Jonathan Greenland: Port Royal Jamaica Project: Progress and Tourism

Karoline-Sofie Hennem: Museum Collection Storage Conditions in Historical Dockyard Buildings – A Threat to The Long-Term Preservation of Maritime Collections?

Dr Katarzyna Jarosz: Abandoned ships. Exploring aging dockyards in the post-Soviet space

Dr Federico Camerin: The 2022 draft agreement for the regeneration of the Venice's *Arsenale*. What if the *Arsenale* dies?

Dr Donatella Rita Fiorino: Research tools and inter-institutional synergies for sustainable redevelopment of former navy sites in La Maddalena Archipelago Sardinia (Italy)

Dr Celia Clark: Doing things differently: how do countries dispose of their surplus defence land? Do these differences offer losses or gains to ex-defence communities and sustainable reuse of historic structures?

#### **KEYNOTE Speaker**

Sir Neil Cossons OBE FSA: Conservation Planning: Creative framework or straitjacket?

### **Day 3. Dockyards as global hubs and regional centres of maritime culture, 11 June 2022**

Dr Philip MacDougall: A Russian Monopoly: Britain's Naval Stores Import Trade

Dr Catherine Scheybeler: Draining Cartagena Dry Docks: Meeting the Challenge with Steam Technology

Dr Roger Morriss: What motivated Samuel Bentham, Inspector General of Naval Works, 1796–1807?

Dr Mark Ericson: Samurai at Royal Dockyards

Dr Jakob Seerup: Dockyards as Reflections of Societies – A Franco-English diplomat's perspective on the Copenhagen Royal Dockyards in 1702

Dr Ann Coats: Royal Dockyard communities and cultures – Portsmouth and overseas

#### **KEYNOTE Speaker**

Professor Andrew Lambert FKC: Dockyards, Fleets and Global Power: 1815–56

**Optional specialist behind-the-scenes archive, ship, dockyard and harbour tours** in the afternoons of 9 & 10 June to be finalised: Admiralty Library Naval Historical Branch Reading Room – Georgian Dockyard Walking Tour – Boathouse 4 – Harbour Tour – HMS *Warrior* – HMS *Victory* – some free, others chargeable.

See <https://navaldockyards.org/conferences/> for all booking information

I very much hope to see you there!

**Dr Ann Coats**

## Work Starts on the Convoys Wharf Development, Deptford

The Naval Dockyards Society have been involved in reviewing the planning applications for this former Royal Dockyard site since the first proposals of 2004. We have highlighted where the designs have not acknowledged the local, national and international significance of Deptford Dockyard. The plans have not provided a quality of design to reflect this, but merely a generic high-rise development that could be located anywhere. We have also argued for the preservation of archaeological remains (including the double dock) and above-ground structures (including the listed Olympia Building) and attention to the interpretation of this historic site.



**Convoys Wharf  
in 2012.  
(Richard Holme)**

Convoys Property Group has outline planning consent to build up to 3,500 housing units on Convoys Wharf, granted in 2015. To date, three plots, Plot 08 (100% for private sale), Plot 15 (10% affordable) and Plot 22 (the jetty), have been granted detailed consent, subject to certain conditions. CPL has a new proposal for a Phase 4 on Plot 21, the protected wharf. The developer currently only has outline planning permission for the first three phases.

The development proposals for Plot 21 are now: 51,200 sqm residential space; up to 650 residential units; up to 2,300 sqm commercial space; about 9,550 sqm of safeguarded wharf space (increased from 3,975 sqm). The proposed buildings range in height from three to thirty-three storeys. This leaves open the possibility of accommodating the *Lenox* project or another wharf use which would be subject to a separate planning application. The community group Voice4Deptford is putting forward a new plan which shows Convoys Wharf as a Centre for Innovation, Education and Research (this may refer to the Olympia Slip Shed, 1846).

Work has started on Plot 08. Planning permission was granted for Plot 08 in June 2020. This is the first phase of the planned total of 3,500 homes. A fourteen-storey building will provide 456 new homes, retail and cafe / restaurant uses, car and cycle parking spaces as well as 'new landscaping and high-quality public realm'. McGee, the principal contractor appointed by Hutchinson Property Group, mobilised on site on 19 July 2021 to commence works, which have consisted of the following: installation of site welfare cabins; establishment and securing of the Plot 08 site with Heras Fencing; protection of the Grade II listed Olympia Building, adjacent trees and areas of interest on site; soil sampling works; structural and condition survey of the Grade II listed Olympia Building. Archaeology works commenced on Plot 08 on 8 August. MOLA was undertaking these works on behalf of Hutchinson Property Group Limited, with McGee in attendance. The archaeology works consisted of a twelve-week period where the 6,100 sqm plot was excavated to a depth of 2m under a strip and map sequence. A controlled archaeological dig was then planned to take place. A McGee piling rig mobilised to site on 27 September 2021. Test piling works confirmed that the design of the piles was valid for Plot 08. UXO Magnetometer surveys were undertaken to detect any unidentified unexploded ordnance prior to piling works commencing. Historic England have conducted site visits to sign off the site to enable construction to commence.

**Dr Paul Brown**



## Time for change – Treasury rules on disposal of surplus defence land

‘All MOD disposals must be handled in accordance with the standard disposal procedures as mandated by Her Majesty’s Treasury . . . the Department must ensure that any disposal ensures best value for the taxpayer, and this is normally done via the open market. The principle is a simple one that where the UK taxpayer has paid to acquire, build and maintain property it is the UK taxpayer that should benefit when the asset is ultimately sold by the Department.’

**Rt Hon Jeremy Quin MP Minister of State for Defence Procurement,**  
letter to Penny Mordaunt MP, 9 February 2022

As part of the Defence Estate Optimisation plan of 2016, the Forces Net website dated 27 November 2020 lists the MOD sites to be closed (<https://www.forces.net/news/your-military-base-closing-read-full-list-sites-shutting>). The MOD Defence Infrastructure Organisation’s Head Office in Sutton Coldfield, which is responsible for these disposals, was listed for disposal in 2021, along with many barracks, RAF bases, ranges, HMS Nelson Wardroom in Portsmouth and Fort Blockhouse 1 in Gosport in 2023, the Royal Citadel in Plymouth in 2024, Royal Marines Stonehouse in Plymouth in 2027. Whether these disposals have actually taken place requires further checks!

The National Audit Office report ‘Optimising the defence estate’ in 2021 criticised the MOD’s record in disposal of its surplus land and welcomed the research findings by the Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust of experience of what happens when MOD sites are disposed of, particularly historic ones. Discussions with a Historic England inspector demonstrated that this narrow definition of public benefit – sale to the highest bidder – often results in poor outcomes for historic sites and long-drawn-out disputes which waste official, local government and developers’ time. This would be avoided if a more cooperative process which includes the many stakeholders were adopted instead.

The MP for Portsmouth South, Stephen Morgan, asked me to draft a series of Parliamentary Questions to raise debate on the issue. These are:

1. To ask the Secretary of State for Defence and its Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) what progress has been made in incorporating a broader view of their approach to the defence estate – as identified by the National Audit Office report ‘Optimising the defence estate’ in 2021, in particular to the disposal of sites which are no longer useful to the country’s defence?
2. In response to the NAO’s criticisms in that report, what consideration is the MOD DIO now giving to the effect of closure on local communities and economies, and to the effect of the current Treasury led system of best financial return – which may conflict with local needs and aspirations for their renewal via regeneration in civilian use?
3. In view of the current operation of the disposal process, would the MOD DIO now acknowledge that there are other social and economic outcomes to the disposal of redundant defence sites which need to be incorporated into evaluation of the process, in addition to financial return? ‘Best value for the taxpayer’ as identified in the Rt. Hon. Minister of State for Defence Procurement’s Letter to Penny Mordaunt MP (9 February 2022) may well not be achieved if it results in conflicts with other government policies, with local planning authorities, heritage agencies, local communities and former owners of defence land, leading to delays and reductions in the eventual values achieved, however they are measured. Would the Secretary of State not agree that avoidance of these conflicts via a more cooperative process justifies the case for re-examination of the Treasury rules – as well as providing a more sustainable return to the taxpayer?
4. Has the MOD DIO examined other countries’ practice in disposal of surplus government land? Italy, France and Germany give redundant defence sites to agencies separate from their Ministries of Defence. These have degrees of regional autonomy and responsiveness to local plans and aspirations. In France and the United States these agencies also offer financial

support to local bodies to rebuild their local economies to benefit ex-defence dominated communities. Would the Secretary of Defence agree that these examples of other countries' practice may offer a more effective and sustainable model to improve the process and outcomes of UK procedures in defence site disposals?

These questions are based on observing how often disposals do not provide the public anticipated benefit to the taxpayer or benefit to ex-defence communities. Local examples of how the system is not working or leading to the desired result include Southwick House, the Allied D-Day advance headquarters just north of Portsmouth and the Royal Naval Hospital Haslar in Gosport. An image of this excellent building is included here.



On 18 May 2021 Princess Anne opened the £300m Defence College of Logistics, Policing and Administration and the Royal Logistic Corps Museum at Worthy Down. It includes two realistic Royal Navy working environments: a ship's galley and a loading bay so trainees can practise loading supplies from a replica quayside, over a gangway, onto a flight deck and down ladders inside the ship (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/princess-royal-opens-new-defence-college-of-logistics-policing-and-administration-and-the-rlc-museum>). This new facility had been expected to release the historic Southwick House (HMS Dryad) for disposal where the Defence School of Policing of Guarding had been based since 2005. The former owner of the Southwick Estate, Mark Thistlethwayte, applied for its return, as set out in the Crichton Down rules. He had plans to develop it as a sports campus with the University of Portsmouth. In November 2016, a Defence Estate review by the Ministry of Defence gave an estimated disposal date of 2025 for Southwick Park. But, to date, Southwick House still remains in MOD hands, despite the new replacement college being open since last May.

The MOD Minister of State for Defence Procurement's letter to Penny Mordaunt MP further asserts that 'when [Haslar] hospital was sold in November 2009, there was very little interest in the site and the sale price represented the site's full market value following fair and open competition. This price would have represented a number of development constraints including poor transport links and listed building status. Many of the buildings were not in a good state of repair and the underground services and utilities that served it were at the end of their economic life.'

This is far from being a verifiable account of what actually happened – which was set out in our chapter on hospitals in my recent book with Martin Marks OBE, *Barracks, Forts and Ramparts: Regeneration Challenges for Portsmouth Harbour's Defence Heritage* (Tricorn Books, 2020). Haslar Hospital was considered so important that the Prince's Regeneration Trust held an Enquiry by Design to set out parameters for its future. We interviewed one of the people who spent two years developing the Veterans' Village to use all the buildings on the site for naval and merchant navy pensioners and their partners, financed by sources in the City of London. Links with Chelsea Hospital and blue uniforms were discussed and the Village had Royal support. The Prince's Trust said to the developers who bought the site: 'The Veterans' Village being at the core of your scheme is attractive because it will enable a continuity of naval heritage whilst at the same time creating a long term sustainable

use for the site. We are also aware of the significant amount of time and effort the Veterans' Village Charity consortia has spent on bringing this vision to a deliverable reality . . . ' Gosport Borough Council said: 'The Veterans' Village concept will offer the best opportunity to protect and continue the heritage of the site and create new job opportunities for the wider community.' Both groups offered to be represented on the Royal Haslar advisory board (Royal Haslar Veterans' Village Consortium proposal (2).pdf).

Even with the best intentions, excellent proposals do not always get realised. Haslar Hospital was sold for the low price of £3m – on the basis of the plan for Veterans' Village. Unfortunately, and inexplicably, no development conditions were placed on the sale to ensure that this actually materialised. The historic Georgian houses for the senior medical officers at either end of the site, its most valuable assets, were sold first. The Officers' Terrace at the western end, residences 1, 2, 3 and 4, were sold for some £450,000 each and the old Admiral's residence, No. 5, sold for £975,000 in 2014. Caroline Dinenage, Gosport's MP, and Mark Lancaster MP have the central, largest house, which they bought from the first private owner. Nos. 6–10 the Terrace were split into ten flats that sold for £250,000 to £300,000 each. Houses 11 & 12 and 13 & 14, facing either end of the main east facade, were also sold. Thankfully, a Section 106 agreement with Gosport Borough Council required the deposit of £6.5m from these proceeds towards restoration of the site's many historic buildings.

Far from the purchase price reaching the full market value, the developers made a huge profit from these sales. They had to pay £26m clawback to the Treasury. Clawback comes into force where the subsequent owner has gained more value than the sale price paid to the MOD. Apart from these early transactions, for several years there was little sign of development. Far from this special naval site being publicly accessible, only the fifty or so residents are allowed into this important naval townscape. You have to be a pretty rich veteran to afford the flats now being built there. Penny Mordaunt MP sent the MOD Minister the reply I drafted for her, setting out the errors of fact in his letter.

The other case raised in her letter is the MOD's sale of the unused former Brompton Road tube station in London, which was owned but not used for many years by the MOD. Rather than sell it to Ajit Chambers as a tourist attraction focused on its history as a tube station, it was acquired by Dmitry Firtash, a Ukrainian oligarch who made his money by taking profits from exports of Russian gas. He owned the house next door and paid £53m for the tube station. He has done nothing with it since. As Oliver Bullough's article in the *Guardian* says (8 March 2022), 'To hand over the old Brompton Road station to Chambers, the government department that owned it, which since the Second World War had been the Ministry of Defence, would have had to overcome the reflex to sell things to the highest bidder, whoever they are and whatever their intentions.'

Clearly, the MOD DIO has much to learn about how to achieve social and economic benefits as well as maximum return to the taxpayer from its sales under the current arrangements.

**Celia Clark**

## **Latest News from Isla del Rey former naval hospital**

The spring seems to be creeping up on us and it's time to prepare for the summer season on Isla del Rey. There's a buzz in the air as plans are being made for more visits due to the huge demand from last year. New rooms are being prepared on the first floor of the Interpretation Centre, this is close to being completed now with nearly all the twenty old wards converted into rooms providing a wide range of information about the harbour of Mahon. The first rooms that visitors will see tell the story of the earliest occupations, going back to the presence of the Carthaginians and Romans, mosaics copied from the paleochristian basilica from the sixth century, through the presence of foreign fleets of Americans, Dutch and Russians and then passing to the British and the French occupations of Menorca and finally to boat construction in the port and Menorcan emigrations to Florida, Algeria, and Argentina.

As I write, more rooms are being prepared with ample information provided on wall plaques, on QR and eventually on videos. Our visitors will have the opportunity of wandering freely through the





**Three views of the Isla del Rey former naval hospital in 2022.**

rooms of the Interpretation Centre by themselves, however, not so on the ground floor with all its antique medical equipment and so much that has been donated to us over the years. Here we are limiting the visit to guided tours, which apart from the traditional Sunday morning visits (the best when the volunteers are working), during the summer months we'll offer a morning and evening tour, on Thursdays in English as well as Spanish.

The much-needed ramp for access is finally being prepared; we're used to long waits for permission. Any work that has to be done here has to pass through a veritable spaghetti of government offices and organizations that each claim some responsibility for a small island in the middle of the harbour of Mahon, each insisting on an investigation and taking its time for the files to work up from the bottom of the pile. Is Menorca unique in this I ask myself?

The Hauser & Wirth Art Gallery has yet to confirm its opening date for the exhibition by the American artist Rashid Johnson, but we're expecting it to be at the beginning of the summer. In the meantime there are workshops and talks amongst other cultural activities planned. Last year, whether to the Art Gallery or to the old hospital, we received 58,000 visitors to the island, this year will be more for sure.

Those of you who would like to come and see us this summer will be very welcome and there is a QR code on page 12 which will be kept updated on transport information and when the tours will be taking place. We will be sharing the Hauser & Wirth website for booking purposes.

So much to see now and so much to tell you about, hope you can make it to Menorca!

**Beverley Ward**

## Falklands News

The fortieth anniversary of the Argentine invasion has passed. An excellent exhibition of photos by Graham Bound of the Falklands during the 1982 war is on display at the Smithery at Chatham Dockyard until 14 June 2022. Graham lived in Stanley during the Argentine occupation and was editor of Penguin News at the time. His evocative photos (two are reproduced below) are well displayed amongst the remnants of the Pipe Bending Floor at the Smithery.

The Falklands Dockyard Museum has happily secured full funding for its £2m Lookout Gallery and extension. The Friends of the Museum – see [www.fimafriends.co.uk](http://www.fimafriends.co.uk) – issue a newsletter from time to time and if you would like to receive this free of charge, please get in touch with me. Recently the Museum has been given the 1982 battle ensign from HMS *Invincible*, see image on page 14.

The Museum and associated Jane Cameron Archives – [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) – have a rich photo library and archives, available online. The online collection now has numerous historic documents including transcribed shipping registers from 1842. For example, I am able to note that HMS *Erebus* arrived on 6 April 1842 under the command of Captain Ross, bound for the Antarctic.

From the photo library, I have been sent images of a battered HMS *Exeter* in Stanley in December 1939, after the Battle of the River Plate. Two are reproduced below. She was patched up by her



Graham Bound



**HMS *Exeter* after the  
Battle of River Plate.**



crew, in the absence of dockyard facilities in Stanley. All sorts of improvised methods were used including the use of redundant railway track to strengthen the hull! This article by an officer on board *Exeter* explains inter alia how this was done (**HMS *Exeter* at the Battle of River Plate – Page 4 of 4 – Naval Historical Society of Australia ([navyhistory.org.au](http://navyhistory.org.au))**).

Maybe similar improvisation was used for other damaged RN ships in distant locations without dockyard facilities, let me know if you can recall any such episodes. Here in consequence *Exeter* was able to sail back to the UK, suitably escorted, and arrived on 14 February 1940 at Devonport where she had been built.

(All images are courtesy of the Falkland Museum, unless stated.)

**Richard Holme**



## Great Quadrangular Store album

The Great Quadrangular Store was the largest industrial building in the world when built at Sheerness Dockyard in 1823–29 to the design of Edward Holl. Its history was covered in an excellent article by Sheppey historian David Hughes in *Dockyards*, November 2019. Tragically the store was demolished in 1978, despite objections from all major conservation bodies. Prior to demolition Mary Weguelli and David Allsop visited and took 100 superb crisp black and white photos. An album with perhaps the only known copies of these photos is owned by NDS member Dr Celia Clark, and it is now on loan to the Sheerness Dockyard Preservation Trust. We have featured photos from the album in *Dockyards*. Scans of all the photos have been made available to the Naval Dockyards Society and can be viewed on request from Dr Ann Coats.

The clocktower from the store was preserved and is now located on the lawn outside Dockyard Terrace in the Dockyard. One small part of the store, the keystone to the west entrance, has recently been located and delivered to the Dockyard Trust where it will be located in the restored Dockyard church.

**Richard Holme**

**Right: General view of the Store before demolition.**  
(Celia Clark)

**Below: Image showing keystone.**  
(Sheerness Dockyard Preservation Trust)



## The Tsar of Russia visits Chatham

In 1698 Tsar Peter I of Russia, later to be better known as Peter the Great, made a point of visiting Chatham Dockyard. He had come to England to study methods of shipbuilding, having already learnt in Russia the basic skills of a shipwright. Much is made of his time at Deptford where, for a few weeks, he worked alongside the artisans of that yard, gaining first-hand knowledge of the scientific approach to warship building as adopted in England. This was different to methods employed elsewhere in Europe, where rule of thumb still predominated. But little is made of his visit to Chatham, a yard that was to have an even greater impact on the fledgling Russian navy as created by Peter on his return to Russia.

At the time, Chatham was the largest naval dockyard in the country and it was ships sent out from Chatham that had escorted Peter across the North Sea from the Netherlands following meetings with William III. It was then that Peter had been invited to England, William wishing to spend more time with Peter so that a trading alliance between Russia and England might be agreed. To impress Peter, a small squadron had been sent out from Chatham consisting of the 54-gun *York*, serving as flagship,

**Right: Peter the Great.  
(Philip MacDougall)**



**Below: The Admiralty, St Petersburg. It was here,  
on a slipway leading into the Neva that the 90-gun  
*Lesnoe* was launched in 1718. (Philip MacDougall)**



**Right: Kronstadt, laid  
down by Peter towards  
the end of his reign; it  
is still the home of the  
Russian Baltic fleet.  
(Philip MacDougall)**



a second man-of-war, *Romney*, together with two yachts, *Mary* and *Henrietta*, and a sloop, *Isabella*. Entering the Thames, Peter was to disembark at Greenwich on 11 January, having sailed past warships anchored at the Nore, the dockyard at Sheerness and the mouth of the Medway which gave access to the dockyard at Chatham. As the voyage along the Thames continued, Peter would also have glimpsed the Royal Greenwich Hospital for naval pensioners (then under construction) and, on the heights overlooking the Thames, the Royal Observatory. It was a voyage carefully designed to impress, it being intended that Peter should have no doubts as to the growing might of England as served by its navy. Beyond, and further up the Thames, he would also have been made aware of the numerous private shipbuilding yards, the naval dockyards of Woolwich and Deptford and the grand ordnance store that would later become the Royal Arsenal.

A unique gift given to Peter by William, and awaiting him in the Thames, was no less than a unique sailing vessel, *Royal Transport*, an experimental Sixth Rate warship built at Chatham and launched in December 1695. Of 220 tons with an overall length of 90ft and armed with 24 guns, she had an incredible turn of speed, being the navy's fastest vessel afloat, able to outrun any armed vessel that she was likely to encounter. John Perry, an engineer who had once served as a naval officer and who Peter recruited into Russian service, confirms her considerable speed when he later wrote that she was 'much the fastest and best yacht then in England, built frigate-fashion [i.e. flush-decked], carrying twenty-four guns'. It was because of her speed that *Royal Transport* was often referred to as a yacht, held back from joining the fleet and given more luxurious internal accommodation than a Sixth Rate warship might normally receive; this for the purpose of conveying leading government figures between William III's two seats of power, Holland and Britain. As for actual proof of her speed, one English diplomat, Narcissus Luttrell, refers to her easily outrunning two French privateers. In being gifted this remarkable vessel, it is not surprising that Peter was determined to visit England, wishing to converse with those who designed this fast vessel and to view the naval yard where she had been built.

The opportunity of visiting Chatham came during the last week of April, the Tsar travelling down the Thames on board *Royal Transport*, which had been officially presented to him a few weeks earlier. On approaching the Nore, the Tsar was transferred to *Peregrine*, a smaller vessel that could more easily navigate the Medway, with Peter boarding several ships moored in the Medway anchorage, including *Britannia* (100 guns), *Duke* (90) and *Triumph* (90), before coming ashore to enter the dockyard at Chatham. Here, Peter met with the Resident-Commissioner, Sir Edward Gregory, before beginning a grand tour of the yard, during which time he would have seen under construction or seasoning in frame five Third Rates, *Somerset*, *Resolution*, *Eagle*, *Expedition* and *Stirling Castle*. A great deal of money had recently been spent on the yard. Peter was shown the newly completed second mast pond with its accompanying mast houses. It was the same mast pond that had been visited by the English traveller Celia Fiennes just one year earlier, and who provided the following description: 'there was in one place a sort of arches like a bridge of brick-work, they told me the use of it was to let in the water there and so they put the masts into season.'\*

Peter would also have seen the ropery with separate buildings for the spinning and laying of rope, numerous workshops, substantial houses built for officers and several recently constructed store-houses.

Given even greater worth to this visit was that on building his own navy's first major dockyards to serve his newly created Baltic Fleet, the Admiralty at St Petersburg and the naval base at Kronstadt, Peter very much had Chatham in mind. In those two yards, he attempted to duplicate the magnificence of Chatham through the range of facilities that were bestowed upon them. Also of note was the influence on the Tsar of one particular ship he had boarded in the Medway, the 90-gun *Triumph*. He had seen her in the process of being fitted out, for she had only been launched a month earlier. In much admiring her, he was to later to model Russia's first three-decker, the 90-gun *Lesnoe*, upon her. Launched at the Admiralty yard on 29 July 1718, *Lesnoe*'s dimensions and overall design closely paralleled that of *Triumph*, with it related by Friedrich Christian Weber, the British representative in Russia at the time, that she was 'built by the Czar himself'. While possibly so, it was doubtless with the help of English shipwrights known to have been recruited from Chatham at the time of his visit to England.

**Philip MacDougall**

**Editor's Note:** Philip's latest book, published in March, is entitled *The Great Anglo-Russian Naval Alliance of the Eighteenth Century and Beyond*. It examines Britain's quest for naval stores in the Baltic during the eighteenth century and the consequent close relationship that existed between Great Britain and the Russian Empire.

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\* Celia Fiennes, *Through England on a Side Saddle in the Time of William and Mary* (London: Field and Tuer, The Leadenhall Press, 1888) section 17 available at Vision of Britain (2009) <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/travellers/Fiennes/17> Accessed 17 January 2022.





## Slaughterhouse alteration, Royal William Yard, Plymouth

The yard was built by Sir John Rennie as a huge new victualling facility for the navy. Completed in 1835, the buildings within it survive and are largely Grade I listed. It now forms a vibrant community with flats, retail, and commercial units (see the general view above). Alterations have been permitted to some of the listed buildings to adapt them for their new use. Although there are occasional objections, the original quality of the yard's assemblage of buildings has been conserved, although the economic, environmental, and social benefits have modified its original utilitarian character.

A recent example was the removal of steps and a door on the main face of the Slaughterhouse, just inside the Yard (Plymouth Planning 21/01036/LBC). The door would be replaced by a new glazed one. It seems the steps were not an original feature of the facade, added later therefore.

The Georgian Group opposed the alteration as 'likely to be part of the original construction'. Historic England considered that the features 'make a modest contribution to the significance of the Grade I listed building for their illustrative historic and aesthetic value', and 'in heritage terms removal of the steps will cause a degree of harm to the significance of the listed building' but did not oppose it. It 'will increase the visibility of the restaurant interior' and create 'a more accessible entrance' and its style is similar to other alterations approved elsewhere in the yard. Planning permission was given on 2 September 2020 on the basis that the steps were preserved and a full record made of the door and steps, prior to their removal.

If the NDS had known about this in time, it would have submitted an opinion. The Heritage Statement includes a contradictory statement: 'We are proposing to retain the timber panelled door and add a glazed steel door behind, as has been done in various other locations within the Yard. It will allow increased visibility of the deli/café area of the Wildwood restaurant' (5.0 Proposed Alterations). However, the accompanying illustration shows just a glazed door in the doorway, therefore a more accurate action would have been to 'replace' the timber panelled door with a glazed door. No evidence has been presented for a later date of the door and steps, which were part of the building at the time of the listing. From illustration (4.0 Existing photos), it appears that the internal floor level is lower than the outside ground level, hence the need for steps. The third interior step is deeper than the exterior third step. The NDS would therefore probably have objected to this removal as diminishing the original character and usage of the building.

As the NDS is not an Amenity Society, it is not automatically notified about planning applications, so it relies on local advocates to raise issues. If anyone local would like us to comment on a dockyard planning application, please contact us.

**Richard Holme (with thanks to the Conservation Sub-Committee for their input)**

## Portsmouth Dockyard state, 27 September 1943

The main dockyard ports produced printed ‘States’ regularly, sometimes daily, listing the location of all the ships. Actual berthing plans are rare, but I found a hand-drawn one in the National Archives for 27 September 1943, which I have redrawn, though not exactly to scale. Unfortunately, it excludes vessels berthed at HMS *Vernon* (torpedo and mining school) and at HMS *Dolphin* (submarine base) and on the Gosport side and up harbour. Contemporary Pink Lists show the allocation of all RN (and allied) ships to Commands and squadrons, some indicated below. Portsmouth would have been even busier in the run up to D-Day.

*Achilles*, New Zealand cruiser refitting No. 13 Dock.

AFD XI Admiralty Floating Dock 54,000-ton lift (empty but later used for building Mulberry Harbour units).

*Albrighton*, Hunt-class destroyer, 1st Destroyer Flotilla.

*Alresford*, navigational training ex-minesweeper refitting.

*Ausonia*, ex-Cunarder, converting to repair ship  
in Basin No. 3.

*Bangor, 9th Minesweeping Flotilla.*

*Bankville*, cable-layer.

*Birch*, minesweeping trawler.

*Blackpool, 9th Minesweeping Flotilla.*

*Bleasdale*, Hunt-class destroyer, 1st Destroyer Flotilla.

*Blyth*, 9th Minesweeping Flotilla.

BYMS 2, 3, 4, 15, 16, 30, US-built minesweepers.

*Cameron*, ex-US destroyer in No. 9 Dock (for shock trials).

Crane Lighter No. 1. 150-ton lift 1913 built.

Crane Lighter No. 7, 25-ton lift 1926 built.

*Deodar*, minesweeping trawler.

*Despatch*, cruiser repairing in No. 3 Basin.

*Eastbourne, 9th Minesweeping Flotilla.*

*Hero*, destroyer refitting in No. 2 Basin.

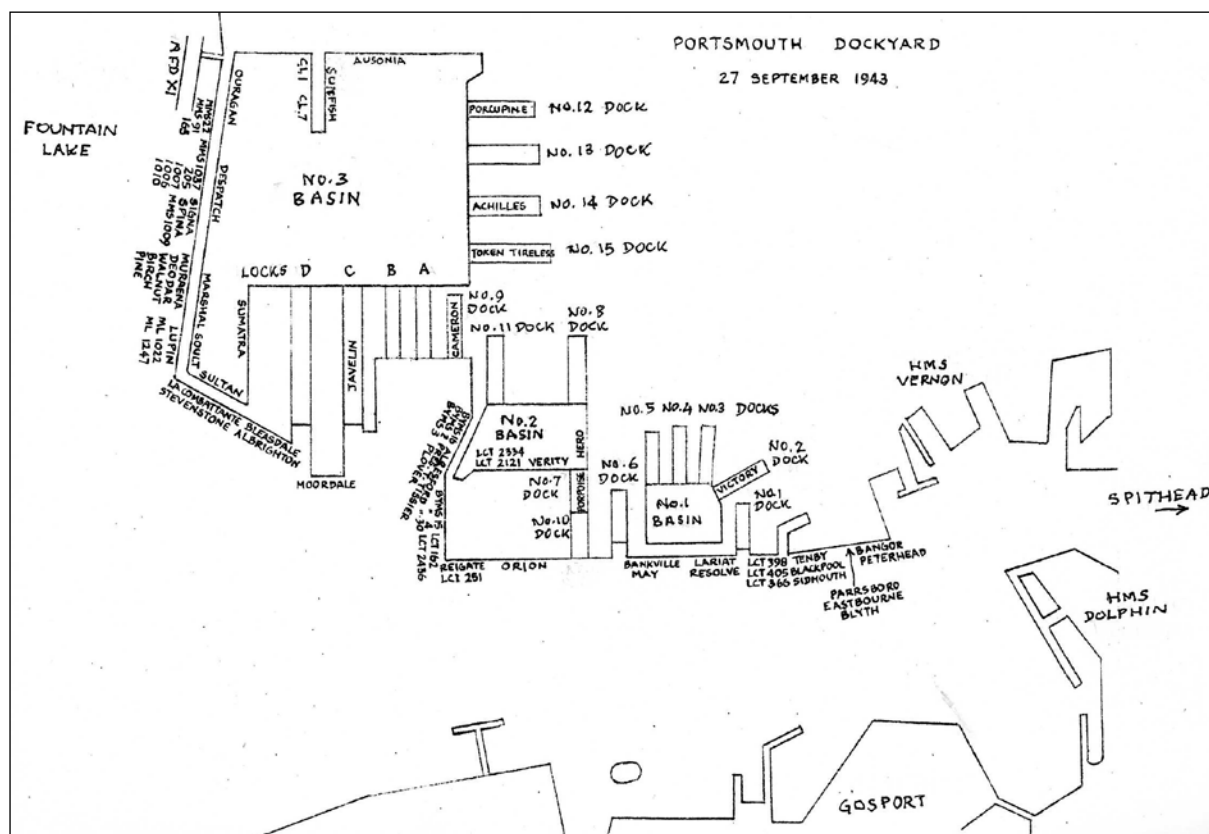
*Javelin*, destroyer refitting C Lock, 14th

Destroyer Flotilla.

*La Combattante*, Hunt-class destroyer, 1st  
Destroyer Flotilla. Free French ex-*Haydon*.

*Lariat*, rescue tug ex-US.

LCI 251 landing craft, infantry.



LCT 162 Mark 2 tank landing craft.  
LCT 366, 398, 405 Mark 3 tank landing craft.  
LCT 2121, 2334, 2436 Mark 5 tank landing craft.  
*Lupin*, sloop.  
*Marshal Soult*, ex-monitor, base ship for trawlers.  
*May*, loop cable-layer.  
ML 1022, 1247, motor launches.  
MMS 22, 91, 165, 205, 105ft motor minesweepers.  
MMS 1006, 1007, 1009, 1010, 1037, 126ft motor minesweepers.  
*Moordale*, mooring vessel.  
*Muraena*, accommodation vessel, ex-yacht.  
*Orion*, 15th Cruiser Squadron, just arrived for repairs from Salerno.  
*Ouragan*, Free French destroyer.  
*Parrsboro*, minesweeper.  
*Peterhead*, 9th Minesweeping Flotilla.  
*Pine*, minesweeping trawler.  
*Plover*, coastal minelayer.  
*Porcupine*, damage repairs in No. 12 Dock, suspended.

*Porpoise*, refitting No. 7 Dock, 5th Submarine Flotilla.  
*President T. Tissier*, Free French training ship.  
*Reigate*, gate vessel.  
*Resolve*, naval tug.  
*Sidmouth*, 9th Minesweeping Flotilla.  
*Signa*, danlayer.  
*Spina*, danlayer.  
*Sultan*, training hulk, ex-ironclad.  
*Sumatra*, Dutch cruiser.  
*Sunfish*, submarine refitting 5th Submarine Flotilla.  
*Tenby*, 9th Minesweeping Flotilla.  
*Tireless*, submarine building in No. 15 Dock.  
*Token*, submarine building in No. 15 Dock.  
*Verity*, escort destroyer refitting in No. 2 Basin.  
*Victory*, No. 2 Dock.  
*Walnut*, danlayer.  
*Bridport*, minesweeper reported refitting Portsmouth but berth not shown.  
*Victoria & Albert*, Royal Yacht. Probably moored off Whale Island.

Dr Ian Buxton

## RNSTS Civilian Staff in the Falklands Task Force 1982

The stated aim of the Naval Dockyards Society is to explore the civil branches of navies and their material culture. This article reveals how close the RN's civilian support organisation and staff were to the Operational customer in the South Atlantic during the 1982 Falklands conflict.

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the 1982 Falklands conflict and recovery of the islands from Argentine occupation. Personnel of all three services took part in the operation, but the presence of MoD civilian personnel on the ships of the Task Force now seems to be almost unknown. This article describes the contribution of the RN Supply & Transport Service (RNSTS) personnel serving in Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) and merchant ships taken up from trade (STUFT), providing front line logistics support 'down south'.

The Admiralty had a long tradition of employing civilian staff in posts that in the army and RAF would be filled by uniformed service personnel. Following creation of the unified Ministry of Defence in 1964 the separate naval supply departments – Victualling, Naval Stores, Armament Supply and the much smaller Movements Department – were merged to form the civilian manned RNSTS. In 1982 its depots across the UK were fully engaged storing the ships of the Task Force in record time to get them away to sea. But in addition, about 250 RNSTS non-uniformed civilian staff, both industrial and non-industrial civil service grades, served in RFAs and STUFT in the Task Force, and were awarded the South Atlantic Medal with rosette for service in the war zone south of Ascension Island.

Historically before World War Two the Royal Navy operated from a network of shore bases around the world and did not need a capability to re-supply at sea. The need for store ships to provide support to warships away from fixed bases only really emerged in World War Two when the RN had to operate in the vast expanse of the Pacific. The 'Fleet Train' of the British Pacific Fleet included stores replenishment ships: some were RFAs but most were commercial ships known then as Merchant Fleet Auxiliaries. As they were in effect floating stores depots the replenishment parties on board were civilian stores staff from the Victualling, Naval Stores, and Armament Supply Departments of the Admiralty. Ships were designated as Victualling Store Issue Ships (VSIS), Naval Store Issue Ships (NSIS) and Armament Store Issue Ships (ASIS). Later ships operated as combined, e.g. NSIS/VSIS.



After the war the number of overseas bases reduced dramatically, and the RN embraced the concept of afloat support. It became routine for HM Ships to deploy with accompanying stores replenishment ships. These came into their own again during the Korean War to provide support close to the area of operations.

When in 1965 the separate supply departments were merged to become the RNSTS, the stores personnel on board RFAs were integrated, under an 'STO(N)' (Supply & Transport Officer (Naval)), a civil servant of Senior Executive Officer (now C1) grade. The composition of the replenishment party, usually known as the stores 'Working Party', varied according to the primary role of the ship, but usually consisted of about forty staff, mostly storekeeping grades. Personnel served afloat for periods of about twelve to eighteen months and then returned home to their parent establishment, although many made repeat tours afloat. The Working Party managed the 're-issue' stores on board – food, clothing, naval stores, and (on armaments ships) ammunition and missiles etc., stowing them in the holds, preparing loads for replenishment at sea (RAS), and delivering them to the RAS point for jackstay transfer, or to the Flight Deck ready for helicopter lift.

At the time of the Falklands War in 1982 all available RFA stores replenishment ships were deployed to the South Atlantic, together with a number of STUFT specially loaded as replenishment ships with an RNSTS working party. Because the STUFT were not fitted with RAS rigs they could not replenish underway, and their main role was to take supplies to transfer to the replenishment RFAs. Prior to the Argentine surrender this was done at anchor at South Georgia. Had the war continued longer the role of the STUFT stores ships to top up the depleted replenishment RFAs would have become increasingly vital to the Task Force.

Establishing the number of civil service staff who served in the South Atlantic is not straightforward. The 30,000-plus recipients of the South Atlantic Medal (SAM) with rosette are listed at the MoD Medal Office at Gloucester in a manual record in alphabetical order, not by individual service. It seems likely that RNSTS numbers have been subsumed in the various broad estimates of RFA and merchant navy personnel that have been made from time to time. However, a good estimate can

**San Carlos Water early morning 24 May 1982, view from RFA *Stromness* of  
RFA *Resource* (nearest) and RFA *Fort Austin*. Later that day an Argentinian bomb exploded in  
the water between *Stromness* and *Resource*; both *Resource* and *Fort Austin* were armaments ships.  
(Author's photo)**



be made from the numbers of STO(N) Working Party staff that served on the ships in the war zone. The following is believed to be a fairly accurate summary.

RFA <i>Fort Austin</i>	44 Standard complement
RFA <i>Fort Grange</i>	44 ditto
RFA <i>Regent</i>	44 ditto
RFA <i>Resource</i>	44 ditto
RFA <i>Stromness</i>	31 Known actual (reduced) complement
MV <i>Geestport</i>	17 Known actual
MV <i>Saxonia</i>	17 ditto
MV <i>Atlantic Conveyor</i>	2 ditto

These total 243, but as the larger RFAs' complements were specially augmented the actual figure is probably a little over 250. Interestingly this is believed to be about the same as the number of Royal Air Force personnel who served in the war zone south of Ascension Island! A further STUFT replenishment ship, MV *Avelona Star* (believed seventeen RNSTS staff), was on its way south, but had not got beyond Ascension by the time of the Argentine surrender.

The number of staff on *Atlantic Conveyor* may look a little strange. As well as the equipment and spare aircraft the ship took south it carried a small replenishment outfit of RNSTS stores, managed by these two staff. They ended up in the water with the rest of the crew after the ship was hit by an Exocet missile but fortunately both survived.

As well as the RNSTS staff in RFAs and STUFT identified above there were fourteen others at Ascension Island: two Oil Fuel Depot personnel on the STUFT tanker MV *Alvega* based there to refuel transiting ships, and a twelve-strong Naval Stores handling party at the airfield. These were all awarded the South Atlantic Medal without rosette.

The RNSTS was disbanded in April 1993 and its functions dispersed among different MoD support organisations. At the same time management of the RFA fleet was transferred to Commander in Chief Fleet. Initially (former) RNSTS personnel continued to provide the STO(N) Working Party in stores replenishment RFAs, but this function was later transferred to uniformed RFA personnel.

An earlier shorter version of this article appeared in the Merchant Navy Association magazine *Full Ahead*, Autumn 2013. The author was STO(N) RFA *Stromness* during the conflict.

**Bernard Mennell**

## A Royal Navy base in Cologne

After hostilities ended in November 1918, twelve RN motor launches (MLs) proceeded from Portsmouth on 22 December to travel to Cologne. Their journey was not easy: going up the Seine river from Le Havre, they had to pass through nearly three hundred locks before reaching their destination. ML 121 and ML 566 were lost en route for unspecified reasons, but were quickly replaced by two MLs stationed at Calais. The flotilla, commanded by Lt Cdr the Hon. Patrick Acheson, had important work to do.

Once in Cologne, they constituted the Rhine flotilla to police the hundred miles or so of river between the Dutch border and Coblenz. They served the Inter Allied Navigation Commission, part of the forces of occupation. A normal day would be patrolling the river between Cologne and Dusseldorf. The Rhine was only at most ten feet deep at low tide so boats of shallow draft were essential. MLs were chosen ahead of coastal motor boats, as inter alia they had more sleeping accommodation. Their bows were strengthened for the assignment, as the river on occasions froze over with up to four inches of ice.

The Flotilla's headquarters was established at the Cologne Water Sports Club, on the river bank. Life in Cologne was not always easy as the officers and crew were not popular for obvious reasons with the local German population. No doubt the feelings of locals were not enhanced by the requisitioning of their club and parades of occupying forces through the city! Although the crew slept in



Richard Holme



Richard Holme

cramped conditions on the MLs, housing in the city was rented for the use of the officers and their families. A distant relative of mine, Lt Stuart, commanded ML 358, part of the flotilla. I am lucky to have an album of seventy-seven photos, many featuring the Flotilla. Happy to email any reader copies, let me know. All pictures in this article are from this.

More information on the day today activities of the Flotilla can be viewed at **The 'Movies' The Ships and Men of the Royal Navy Motor Launch Patrol, 1914–1919: The Rhine Patrol Flotilla – Part Two**

The files at TNA reveal continual pressure by the Admiralty to reduce the size of the flotilla and even withdraw it all together. The various factors behind this were cost,\* the nature of the work (more suited to the army in their view) and the fact that the boats were crewed by enlisted men, keen to return to civilian life. It seems that only the influence of the Army of Occupation kept the flotilla in existence. Some robust correspondence took place, particularly in 1919 and 1921 as the Admiralty sought to withdraw the flotilla or, on cost grounds, have the MLs crewed by army personnel. One War Office letter reveals the strength of feeling:

I am commanded by the Army Council to say that in their opinion the withdrawal of the Rhine Motor Launch Flotilla is most undesirable. The work of this flotilla in patrolling the river and preventing the importation of arms, and possibly the transportation of German troops by the river, is one of great military importance. The Army Council hope that the Lords of the Admiralty will see their way to retaining this flotilla and will issue the necessary instructions to this effect.†

There were clearly fears that the Germans might look to possibly even resume hostilities and one War Office letter of 1921 refers to them, presumably inadvertently (!), as the 'enemy'.

An uneasy compromise was reached whereby the flotilla reduced in size over the years. There were only five by October 1922 and the flotilla withdrew altogether by 1926.

It seems the flotilla's spell in Cologne was uneventful although in late 1919, ML 229 blew up, while refuelling at the jetty by the Club.

The Electric Launch Company in the USA built 550 MLs for use by the Royal Navy at a cost of US \$22m. They were brought over to the UK as deck cargo, four at a time. They were of simple construction, had a maximum speed of 19 knots and normally had a crew of two officers and eight men. They were particularly useful in anti-submarine duties. After the end of the war, the vast majority

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\* Annual personnel cost alone was £20,000.

† War Office letter to Admiralty 14.11.1919 TNA ADM 8545/316.



were sold off for private use, particularly as houseboats or pleasure craft. Intriguingly one survives by the Thames at Isleworth Ait, ML 286, albeit in a poor condition as perhaps one would expect. It has been usefully surveyed by the Museum of London, please see: **Geomatics skills exchange with the Univesitat Politècnica de València I MOLA**

**Richard Holme (with acknowledgments to Phil Simons)**

## Ship's screw on a railway track

The editor was very glad to hear from three sharp eyed readers concerning the Ravilious picture of Chatham dockyard in the last edition, reproduced below again.

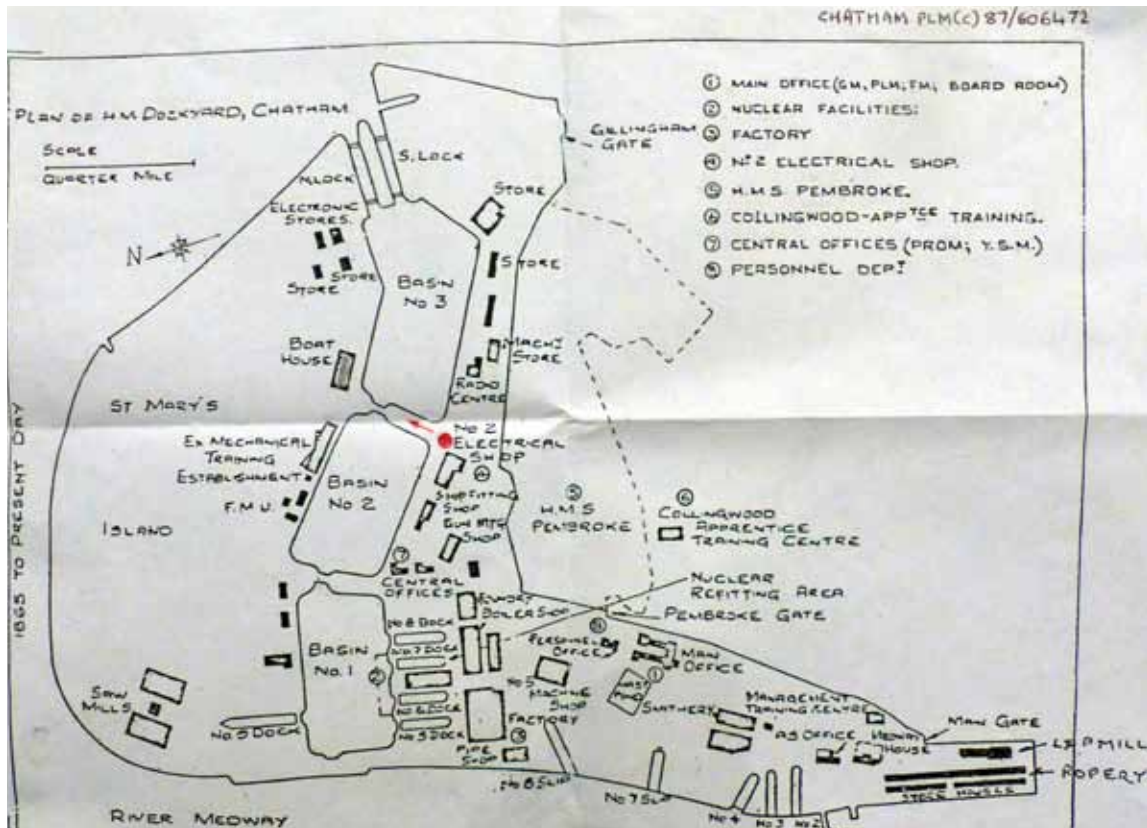
First of all Dr Ian Buxton commented interestingly on the propeller on the truck.

It does indeed look like a destroyer propeller. Around that time they were three-bladed about 10ft in diameter (cruisers 11ft). It looks just wider than the truck, which if typical British loading gauge would be about 9ft wide. Colour suggests manganese bronze. 'Newly forged': actually, propellers were cast not forged. 'Nearby foundry': foundry yes, nearby dubious. Making warship propellers was a specialised business which I don't think the dockyards did in the 20th century. The nearest manufacturer was Stones at Charlton. Two others were Manganese Bronze at Birkenhead and Bulls Metal in Glasgow.

Sheppey historian David Hughes helpfully located the subject matter of the picture as follows (see his sketch map of the dockyard on page 26).

Concerning the building shown in the far background, the only structure to have had a similar three-ridged roof was the large Boat House which was situated on St Mary's Island, near to the north





west corner of No. 3 basin. The two bodies of water shown on the left- and right-hand sides of the picture must therefore be parts of the No. 2 and No. 3 Basins respectively, the view looking north east between the two. From this the railway truck may have been as shown by the dot on the map, and the direction of the view shown by the arrow.

Jim Riddle agrees with David's opinion and goes into more detail:

I can only but guess that the aim of the painting was to highlight the warm glow of the bronze propeller, against the cold, dark and austere background of a dockyard. If a photo had been taken from the same location there would have been a large amount of detail displayed, which would have detracted from the intended (suggested) aim of the picture. We can assume that these thoughts were not recorded by the artist. Working dockyards are/were notoriously cluttered, noisy and dirty environments.

The quotation (in the last edition of *Dockyards*) implies that this was a remote corner. It would have been quiet after working hours, but was fairly central and busy during the working day. You are, I believe, correct in assuming that this location is in the Victorian extension and it is broadly from the south, looking north.

I would say that the view painted, more specifically, is looking north-east along the promontory between 3 Basin on the right and 2 Basin on the left. 3 Basin is strangely devoid of ships, as about a third of this 27 acre basin is included in the picture. On the left side is the east wall of 2 Basin, with a vessel secured alongside, in the S.E. corner. This looks to be a PAS (Port Auxiliary Service) vessel rather than a warship, perhaps a tank cleaner or water carrier.

The promontory has an 84ft wide gap to allow movement of ships and harbour craft to freely move between basins, this gap, biased towards the north approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  South and  $\frac{1}{4}$  North. A lifting girder bridge would be on the left behind the crown of the tree, which gave access when the caisson had been removed, which would be sunk on the right or 3 Basin side. A very similar arrangement to this was on the promontory between 1 and 2 Basins.

The caisson was of the sunken type, which was placed over a groove in the masonry and flooded, to settle down. A diver normally checked that the groove was clear. The same arrangement was

employed in the other entrance, mentioned, between 1 and 2 Basins, as well as the five dry docks in 1 Basin and the three river dry docks. The entrance north and south locks in 3 Basin were of a different type, which were sliding caissons, each with a ramp road lift, that enabled the locks to be retracted into the Bull's Nose island, with massive 'bicycle' type chains. Inner and outer north lock gates were staggered in respect of south lock gates to allow them to pass alongside each other.

This particular entrance in the painting was normally closed off on long weekends or holidays or otherwise when we performed a 'canaling' operation. Normal working times would allow craft/ships to move freely between basins and the caisson was lifted and was usually secured alongside the spur in the NW corner of 3 Basin. This would have been evident in the painting.

On the left side of the promontory, 2 Basin side, would be a latrine block, and various sheds, all brick built. On the right side of the promontory, west wall of 3 Basin, would be chain guard rails, three steam capstans and about a dozen square single Victorian bollards, similarly replicated on the east wall. There would also be electrical hook up points to power alongside berths and unused brows (gangways), ready to be lifted inboard.

At some point, there was constructed a dockside crane, alongside 3 Basin west wall, mobile, N/S on rail tracks. This may have been there at the time, and omitted as excess detail. It was not there in 1932, but could have been installed before the war, and shown on a very shaky aerial photo of 1939?

Perhaps the most distinguishing feature in the painting is the building in the background. This is the 'new' and then active boathouse. It appears alongside the north wall of 3 Basin, but this is an issue of perspective. There is a dockside working area, with capstans, bollards etc. enclosed within chain guard rails, a pavement, road including railway track, and pavement, this side of its south wall.

The artist has accurately captured the boathouse location, as the three gable ends and their west wall extend beyond the N/S west wall of 3 Basin. From the east end of the boathouse is a raised bank. This is intended to be a distant view of the Bund (bank) surrounding St. Mary's Island and alongside the meander of the Medway, running around Short, Cookham and Upnor Reaches.

In the foreground of this picture, the rail truck with embarked screw appears to be on the southernmost railway track, running East/West. The other track, there only being two, is closer to the basin edge and may be indicated by the line of disturbed snow, running from the boss of the screw leftwards to the edge of the painting and behind the tree. There is also a snow-covered spur running up the promontory and across the caisson.

The final piece of evidence is the snowstorm blowing in on a cold easterly wind. I remember that well!

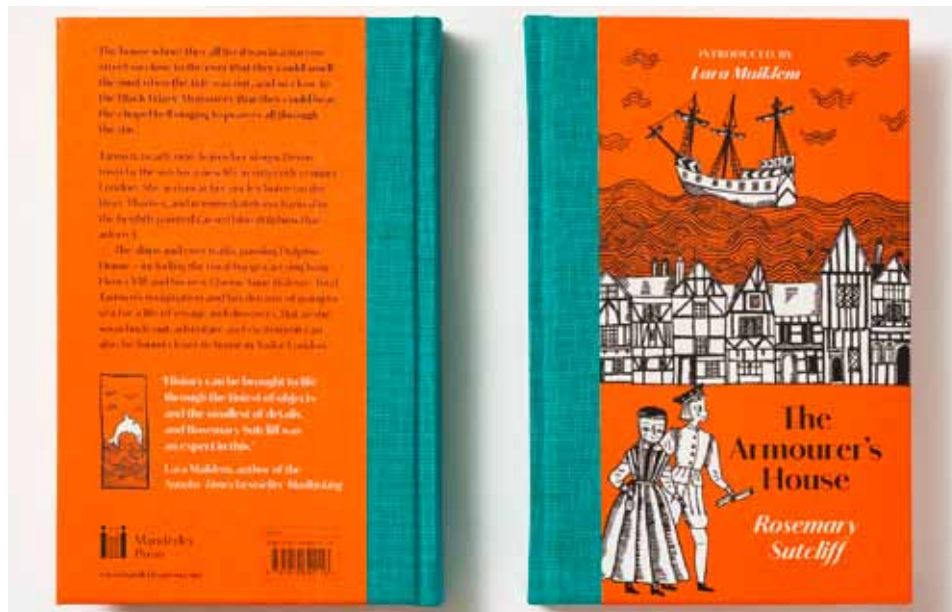
## BOOK REVIEW

### *The Armourer's House* by Rosemary Sutcliff

**Manderley Press, 2022. HB, 129 x 198mm, 296pp. With an introduction by Laura Maiklem.  
ISBN 978-1-9196421-1-6. £16.99**

One cold March day early in the reign of Henry VIII, Tamsyn Caunter, an orphan at not quite nine years old, sets off to London with her Uncle Gideon to live with him and his family in the armourer's house on the bank of the Thames close to the Blackfriars' Monastery. She dreams of going to sea with her Uncle Martin, ship owner in Bideford, and sail to the Indies; and so does Piers, oldest surviving son in her new London family now that his brother Kit is missing presumed drowned at sea: but she is a girl and Piers must be apprenticed to his father as an armourer and swordsmith.

The routine of her new London life as it cycles through the year is presented in detail. There is an Easter picnic at Chelsea Meadows, Morris dancers and apprentices' battles in the streets on May Day, archery practice on Midsummer's Eve, a sighting of Anne Boleyn and the King's Grace in their Royal Barge (there are many faux archaisms and many capitals), stories by the fireside at Hallowe'en, and finally a Christmas afternoon visit to the royal dockyard at Deptford and 'sugar-bread and apricots' at the Master Shipwright's house (there are many hyphens). Through this narrative



Tamsyn's and Piers' longing for the sea is returned to: in the chapter 'Tall Ship Magic' they cast a spell to 'build' a ship called the *Dolphin and Joyous Venture* and 'sail' into the Golden West, where they meet a Spanish galleon:

'By Cock and Pie! It's the *Santa Margarita* herself! And she's trying to head us off! Oh no you don't, Don Spaniard! The seas are free to all! Hold her to her course, helmsman. Trumpeter, sound to Quarters. Clear the decks for action! Run out the guns!'

On Christmas Eve there is a knock at the door: it is Kit, not drowned after all but safe home following a long passage to India and back via Lisbon and the Canaries. This means that Piers can go to sea: and 'one day, when he had risen to be Master of the *Joyous Venture*, he would come back for her. And they would sail out over Bideford Bar and away beyond Lundy into the Golden West, and have adventures together.'

Rosemary Sutcliff wrote many books for children: this was her third. Some readers have found it 'charming' and 'delightful'. The critic Gillian Lathey, in an essay in *Historical Fiction for Children* (2001), observes that Tamsyn's new household 'resembles nothing so much as that of a 1950s' middle-class British family' and that 'Archaisms in the novel add a patina of historical romance to the reinforcement of familiar values': the combination of the 'archaic' language and the 'modern' language of the 1950s, now itself archaic, with the narrative voice's didactic explanation of the archaisms, such as 'Mary-buds (marsh marigolds we call them nowadays)', has not worn well.

*The Armourer's House* was originally published in 1951 with a dozen line drawings by her regular illustrator C. Walter Hodges. This new edition, in an unsympathetic typeface influenced by the lettering tradition of the eighteenth century, omits those but has attractive cover illustrations, endpapers, and chapter openers in a contemporary style by Isabel Greenberg.

N. Blake

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