

HM Naval Base

Information Sheet

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Portsmouth is the home of the Royal Navy playing a vital role in the defence of the realm. As one of the largest industrial complexes in the world during the eighteenth & nineteenth centuries the Dockyard has been on the leading edge of new technology boasting many world firsts.

Early History

King Richard I ordered the construction of a dockyard in Portsmouth, and granted the town its first charter, in 1194. Eighteen years later, his brother King John I instructed that the dockyard be enclosed "by a good and strong wall". King Henry VII began to fortify the town of Portsmouth to counter the growing use of gunpowder in 1495. He also constructed the first known dry dock in the world, completed in 1496 (site beneath present Naval Base near HMS Victory), and thereby formally established the Royal Dockyard & Portsmouth as a Garrison Town. It was from this point that a history of shipbuilding began.

In January 1548, twelve ships, fourteen galleys, six pinnacles and ten row barges made the greatest part of the English fleet in Portsmouth Harbour. By 1550 the whole fleet, assembled in Portsmouth (except one vessel), amounted to 53 sailing ships manned by 5,136 seamen, 1,885 soldiers and 759 gunners.

During Elizabeth I's reign a major fire destroyed a naval storehouse in King Street in 1557 and another fire destroyed most of the Dockyard in 1570. The naval storehouse in King Street was destroyed again in 1576.

The 1600s

By 1626 there were 4,000 soldiers quartered at Portsmouth. The number of seamen on men-of-war ships was 3,935 with 594 in other ships. In 1649 the

first Navy Commissioner, Colonel Willoughby, was appointed to Portsmouth Dockyard.

The restoration of Charles II in 1660 brought in increase in the size of the Royal Navy. New buildings and docks were built in the Dockyard and the Dutch engineer Bernard de Goome redesigned the defences of Portsmouth. Rebuilding started in 1662 and lasted for the rest of the century. In 1663 eight acres were added to the Dockyard to allow the building of the Great Ropehouse (subsequently destroyed by fire in 1760). In 1666 work started on construction of the Mast Pond (the oldest working part of the Dockyard) dug by 60 soldiers and local labour. The Dockyard Commissioner's home was built at this time. In 1698, the Great Ship Basin (No.1) was built.

The 1700s

Continuous wars in during the eighteenth century brought prosperity to the city and a gradual enlarging of the dockyard.

In 1700 No.6 (North Dock) was opened and the first dockyard church of St Anns was built in 1704. The Porter's Lodge built in 1708 is the oldest surviving building in the Dockyard. The Main Gate (known as Victory Gate) is the historic main entrance to the Dockyard, the existing pillars dating back to 1711. It was widened in November 1943 to accommodate large vehicles, its role continued until 1984 when Unicorn Gate, more conveniently located at the centre of the expanded Naval Base, assumed this role.

The Dockyard Wall along Queen Street is a scheduled ancient monument, completed in 1711. The Parade (Long Row) was built in 1717 and the Admiral Superintendent's house is an enlargement of No.9. The

Royal Naval College was established in 1729 but moved to Greenwich in 1872. Colleges Road gives access to some of the finest buildings in the Naval base notably the Old Naval Academy built in 1732.

Three great Storehouses, No.9 (built 1782), No.10 (built in 1779) and No.11 (built in 1763) together form a narrow public access corridor linking one end of the site with the other. There have been other more recent alterations to these properties.

In 1770 the Great Ropehouse was rebuilt. A great fire in the Dockyard with losses estimated at £149,880 destroyed the Ropehouse. In 1773 works commenced to fortify the town but at this stage the Dockyard remained undefended from landward attack. In 1777 Lion Gate was built at the west end of Queen Street, it was removed in 1871 and finally built in the base of Semaphore Tower.

The Unicorn Gate was finished in 1779 (it was subsequently moved to Unicorn Road entrance to Dockyard 1865). The dockyard was enlarged by 15 acres in 1780 and the facilities improved. In 1784 work commenced on Admiralty House, designed by architect Samuel Wyatt and was completed in 1786. Admiralty Clerk of the Works at this period was Thomas Telford, a Civil Engineer.

No.1 Dock was constructed in 1789 and is located adjacent to HMS Victory & the Victory Gallery. By 1790 the Dockyard employees numbered 2,219. Since 1795 the Channel Fleet was based at Portsmouth. A Pay Office was built c.1798, it was where John Dickens, father of the author Charles worked as a pay clerk.

The 1800s

In 1800, the Royal Navy had 684 ships and the yard was the world's largest industrial complex. The Napoleonic Wars brought Portsmouth to pre-eminence as a Naval Dockyard & fleet base being on the front line. HMS Victory evokes those stormy years when the Royal Navy protected Britain against invasion.

Boathouse No.5, a 19th Century timber building, which sits on stilts above the mast pond, was originally built as a masthouse and subsequently rebuilt for the same purpose. Boathouse No.7 is a larger version of Boathouse No.5 and was built at about the same time.

No.1 Dock, known as the Great Ship basin (see 1698), was enlarged and opened in 1801. In 1802 the No.2 Dock was completed (It has been the berth of HMS Victory since 1922). In 1802 No.3 Dock was constructed (it now contains the remains of the Mary Rose).

In 1802 the Block Mills were constructed and this is the most important surviving industrial building in the Dockyard. It housed the world's first completely steam powered factory for the mass production of ships' rigging blocks using Marc Isambard Brunel's revolutionary machine tools.

The end of the Napoleonic Wars resulted in huge layoffs and in 1816 a total of 402 Dockyard workers were laid off. The School of Naval Architecture (later the Tactical School) was established in the Dockyard. In 1822 the Dockyard reorganised and the labour force was reduced to 2,200 leading to 160 Dockyard men being laid off (following 80 men being laid off the previous year). This was only temporary as soon the development of steam propulsion heralded the yard's greatest expansion to date. Within 20 years, the work force had trebled and in 1829, the yard built the world's first steam screw warship, HMS Fox. Marine Officers Barracks were built (these moved to Eastney around 1870). Also in 1822 Semaphore Tower was built on the Square Tower as one of a series of stations communicating with the Admiralty in London.

The Cell Block was built in 1882. Ship Shop No.3 was built about 1884 (eventually demolished 1980). In 1845 No.6 Boathouse was built with yellow bricks to form a three-storey building as a backdrop to the Mast Pond. A military engineer, Lt Beatson, designed the boathouse. In 1847 there was a major extension to the Dockyard. In 1848 a new Steam Basin (No.2) was opened by Queen Victoria on 25 May. The Semaphore on the Square Tower was dismantled and moved to Southsea Common. Ship Shop No.2 Dockyard was built in 1849.

1860 saw the commencement of demolition of the fortifications of Portsmouth and Portsea. The Royal Commission reported with a new scheme for fortifications of Portsmouth. In 1861 the enlargement of Whale Island commenced using spoil from the works to the new docks.

In 1865 the Dockyard was extended by 261 acres and Whale Island further increased in size using the spoil from the dock works. Unicorn Gate was re-positioned at new site in Unicorn Road in 1865.

One thousand Dockyard men emigrated to Canada during the period of 1869-70. In 1874 a serious fire in the Dockyard destroyed the West Storehouse. In 1875 Tidal and Repairing basins were opened. In 1876 the Dockyard extension works were completed (an increase in size from 116 to 300 acres). Victory Gate is flanked to the west by the Cell Block constructed in 1882. In 1896 Docks 14 & 15 were opened.

The 1900s

In the 20th century the military base drew related business to the island and large multi-national defence companies are currently well represented. However the post war years have seen the number of jobs in the Dockyard steadily decline and the City Council has tried to diversify its economy by providing new industrial sites to attract inward investment and improve transport communications into the City. The City remains very much a naval town with a significant proportion of its workforce still reliant on the defence industry for employment.

The origins of the associated Royal Naval Museum are to be found in the Dockyard Museum founded in 1911.

In 1913 Semaphore Tower was destroyed by fire. It was rebuilt to present structure incorporating resited Lion Gate. The First World War had a major impact on the town. The Dockyard expanded its workforce to 23,000 working day and night shifts. Nearly 3,000 ships were replaced and refitted besides the normal victualling and arming of warships. The 1918 War record of the Dockyard reads: 1,200 vessels refitted including 40 battleships, 25 cruisers & 400 destroyers; 1,658 vessels docked & repaired. It was at this time that submarines started to be built in Portsmouth.

1922 HMS Victory entered No.2 Dock on 12 January and restoration work was commenced the following year. These restoration works were completed in 1928. In 1938 the Victory Gallery was built. It is a single storey building with upper gallery housing part of the Royal Naval Museum, which relates to HMS Victory. It also provides office accommodation and forms the start of the Museum tour.

The Trafalgar Building (formerly known as Victory Quarters Building) was constructed in 1939. It is located between No.2 Dock (HMS Victory) & No.3 Dock (Mary Rose ship hall) and houses shore based accommodation for the crew of HMS Victory and for her complement of civilian guides, public lavatories, civil defence lecture facilities & a series of showers & washrooms.

Boathouse No.4 was partially built in 1939, it was designed to extend from the southern end of Storehouse No.9 to Victory Gate. However due to the outbreak of the Second World War it was never completed.

The former Pay Office lost some of its surrounding veranda (the original sentry's walk) through action during Second World War. It is nevertheless one of the Dockyard's most important buildings both architecturally and historically. The brick vaulted structure supported by cast iron columns represents the first example of

such fireproof construction to be found in southern England. The exterior/interior has been little changed since the building was in use as a Pay Office & where John Dickens, father of the author Charles worked as a pay clerk.

Ship Shop No. 3 suffered bomb damage in 1941 and lost part of its second floor. A temporary corrugated iron repair and access to what remained of the second floor was undertaken by the Ministry of Defence immediately following damage. This still exists today.

Bombing in World War II virtually destroyed some areas of the City. The Dockyard was devastated. In 1945 there was a workforce of 45,000.

The dockyard saw a decline in the 1960s. The City Council's response was to release land and develop it by attracting firms from outside Portsmouth to invest in the City and help develop those firms, which were already based in Portsmouth. In 1960 the Great Ropehouse, then the longest building in Europe (1095 ft 8 1/2 ins) was gutted, restored and the roof replaced.

The use of the Block Mills ceased in 1965 and most of the equipment was put into storage or on limited display at a number of locations in Portsmouth, London and America. A review of the Dockyard was undertaken and a number of buildings in the Dockyard were Listed or declared Scheduled Ancient Monuments especially those built before 1900s.

Storehouses Nos.9 and 10 were altered at the ground floor level in the 1970s to form a colonnade through which the public can walk under cover.

In 1975 the Heavy Plate Shop (12,700 square metres) was completed at the Naval Base. In 1980 there was the demolition of oldest surviving iron arched building Ship Shop No.3 in Dockyard in February. Part of the Dockyard has been declared a Conservation Area. It was first declared in March 1975 and then was incorporated in a larger area on 19 January 1981.

Impact of the UK Defence Review

There was further decline in the 1980's resulting from Defence Reviews announced in the Government white paper "The UK Defence Programme – The Way Forward", in 1981. Portsmouth City Council made an assessment of the impact on the local economy and what measures could be taken to counter this, i.e. reducing reliance on the Navy by diversifying into industries, etc. In July 1981 Parliament confirmed the run-down of the Dockyard by announcing the reduction of the labour force from 7,200 to approximately 1,200.

In 1982 the Government announced plans to close a number of shore establishments in the City. The

Falklands Conflict granted a brief reprieve with many vessels being made ready in the Yard and returned to the Dockyard in Portsmouth at the end of the conflict. This secured a number of jobs but only on a temporary basis.

The Historic Dockyard Attractions

The Mary Rose, which sank off Southsea Castle in 1545 was successfully raised from the seabed on October 11th 1982 and taken to Dry Dock No.3 where it has been stored. This was the largest archaeological recovery operation ever mounted.

In 1985 the Historic Dockyard was formally organised to represent the variety of interests in the area i.e. the Royal Navy, number of preservation trusts and private organisations. The 12acre site was partitioned from the balance of the working Yard. It contained many historic buildings and dry docks and currently houses major attractions such as HMS Victory, Mary Rose, HMS Warrior (the world's first ironclad warship built in 1860, which arrived in Portsmouth following an extraordinary restoration) and the Royal Naval Museum.

In 1997 over half a million people visited the attractions of the Historic Dockyard.

The 1990s

Storehouse No.9's first and second floors were converted in 1991 to provide a library, office and storage space for the Royal Naval Museum.

Storehouse No.10 remains architecturally the grandest of the three storehouses with a central arch opening at ground floor level and an impressive Clocktower rebuilt as part of an award winning restoration in 1992.

In 1994 a new visitors gallery was constructed within the Mary Rose ship hall to allow views of the ship under conservation with an audio interpretation tour. In 1993/1994 capital investment of over £4 million (from the European Union, City Council and private sector sources) led to improved visitor facilities including; new viewing galleries for Mary Rose ship hall; conversion of Boathouse No.7 to provide restaurant, play area, education space & new exhibition space; new visitor reception area; new shop for Warrior; conversion of oldest extant building in the Dockyard (1708), the Porter's Lodge, to provide security facilities & offices for the central services company. A new company, "Flagship Portsmouth" was formed to improve the co-ordination of day-to-day visitor management and marketing of the Historic Ships and Dockyard.

In 1995/6 the Ministry of Defence propose to lease No.1 Dock to the Jubilee Sailing Trust to build a new

sailing vessel to encourage the integration of able-bodied with the disabled.

Millennium Projects

The Historic Dockyard forms the northern end of the Promenade on the Portsmouth side of Portsmouth Harbour constructed as one of the "Millennium Projects". In addition there were a number of other projects planned within the area, including the establishment of a research and teaching centre for maritime heritage studies and an interactive display in a restored Georgian Storehouse. Action Stations, part of the Millennium Projects, is a new £16million attraction opened at Portsmouth's Historic Dockyard on 4 July 2001, in Boathouse No. 6. Part funded by the Millennium Commission, it is unique in bringing the modern high-tech Royal Navy within reach of the public.

Recent Developments

In 2002, following the success in securing a contract to build part of six new destroyers for the navy, Vosper Thornycroft came back into Portsmouth to build ships. Vospers moved from their 50 acres Woolston site in Southampton to new purpose built premises within the Dockyard, guaranteeing jobs for 1,200 people for at least the next 10 years. The Ministry of Defence has leased the land at the dockyard to Vosper Thornycroft.

Relevant Local Plan Policies

Policies for the development of the Historic Dockyard were incorporated into the proposed modifications to the Portsmouth City Local Plan 2001-2011. Policy CD17 states:

Within the Historic Dockyard Heritage Area, as defined on the Proposals Map, proposals for mixed use development which enhance the vitality of the area and which support its attractiveness as a tourist destination will be permitted they:

- (i) Provide adequate means of access to the proposed development;**
- (ii) Maintain the safety and security of existing military uses; and**
- (iii) Safeguard the historic environment**

The uses that would be appropriate as part of a mixed use scheme include residential, B1 employment and tourism-related uses.

As part of its review of existing land holdings within the Dockyard, the MoD has identified this area as one where several development opportunities may emerge within the plan period. While there is limited public access within the Historic Dockyard itself, the MoD envisages that the character of the area may change significantly within the longer term, with an emphasis upon a mixture of military and non-military uses. Non-military uses could include residential, employment and tourism, incorporating the re-use of buildings and land identified by the MoD as having no immediate operational role. Proposals should take account of the area's naval heritage and there may be opportunities to boost the existing leisure and tourist attractions within the Dockyard area by means of complementary attractions. A development masterplan will be prepared for the area and will identify those sites which may come forward for development.

Proposals must take account of the conservation area status of this area, and the many listed buildings which fall within it, and new development must be of an exceptionally high standard of design. It is estimated that the conversion of buildings could yield at least 200 new dwellings.

Project Prime

On 29 April 2004, the MoD produced a press release concerning the future release of 30 acres of land in the dockyard for private development. Ministerial approval has been given to the initial phase of "Portsmouth Regeneration and Investment in the Maritime Estate", hence where the name Project Prime is derived from. The timing of the release of the land will be determined by the MoD, but could be over a number of years. It is likely that the naval base land will not be sold, but any disposal of parts would be on the basis of long leasehold.

Around 55 buildings of various sizes in the Georgian dockyard are included in the project, dating in age from approximately 1750 to 1950. As the site contains many listed buildings, the project has been the subject of consultation between several groups and organisations, including the Ministry of Defence, Portsmouth City Council, English Heritage, Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust and Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. Sensitivity to heritage issues is one of the hallmarks of Project Prime, and the MoD has consulted closely with English Heritage over listed buildings which today are more suited to private development than to military use. Of specific historical interest are the Old Naval Academy and Block Mills. The Old Naval Academy is currently an Officers Mess and is included in the plan for possible lease for commercial use. Block Mills housed one of the

first mechanised production lines in the early 19th century, a system designed by Mark Brunel, father of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. It is therefore an important heritage asset and as such, is the subject of specific discussion with English Heritage.

Not included in the area for lease are the Naval Base headquarters in Semaphore Tower, as the future aircraft carriers will be berthed close by in years to come, and the Second Sea Lord will continue to use Admiralty House as his official residence. Plans to change to St Ann's Church are not envisaged, either, as it has been the spiritual home of the Royal Navy since its construction in 1785. The church has a large Naval and civilian congregation whose needs are served by the chaplaincy there and as such, the church is irreplaceable.

It is anticipated that the leased area would be suitable for leisure, residential and commercial use, complementing the shopping and leisure complex at Gunwharf Quays which itself occupies the site of the former naval establishment HMS Vernon. Existing staff will be relocated to new, higher-density development in other, currently unused parts of the Naval Base. Modern facilities would be more appropriate to the needs of a 21st century Navy, and could be financed out of the proceeds and savings made through the proposed commercial development.

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