DOCKYARDS

The Naval Dockyards Society
Exploring the civil branches of navies and their material culture

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www.navaldockyards.org

SS Nomadic, ‘little sister to the Titanic’, pictured with the original 1867 caisson to the dock in Belfast – see the article on this very interesting ship on page 22.

Contents of this issue

Note from the editor 2 Transactions: an update . . . 2 New NDS events for 2015 3
Plymouth and Devonport Revisited: Naval Dockyards Society Tour, September 2014 3
Clothing the British sailor, 1760–98 22 SS Nomadic, Titanic’s little sister 22 Obituaries 25
Meet the Committee – Philip MacDougall 26 HM Naval Dockyards, East Africa – Help needed 27 ‘The Dockyards’ Waterloo?’ NDS Conference 2015 28
Note from the Editor

Welcome to another issue of Dockyards. It is my fourth as editor and I hope you enjoy it. Since the last issue I have enjoyed the maritime museum in Barcelona, which is housed in the very elegant Drasannes shipyards. I have also been to Ipswich, where many buildings in the former docks area have been conserved amidst more modern construction (see 1845 Custom House pictured). Unfortunately other commitments prevented me travelling to Plymouth on the NDS trip but it seems this went very well, as ever (see Ann Coats’ report). If you have not been on one of these trips, I would heartily recommend them.

Custom House Ipswich, completed 1845 at a cost of £4500 to designs of the Ipswich architect John Medland Clark (1813–1849). Designed to complement the adjacent new Wet Dock, then under construction.

We reported on the new Falkland Dockyard Museum in the last issue and I have been pleased to hear that this has secured significant commercial sponsorship and is going from strength. In the UK, financial support of this type can be harder to find and in August it was sad to see HMS Plymouth towed away for scrap after years of campaigning for her preservation. I will write on this further in the next issue as I had a minor involvement in the campaign and there are lessons to be learned.

We recently asked readers on email for their views about Dockyards and many thanks to those who responded. Most seemed happy with the current content and format of Dockyards although there was a call from some for more material on dockyard crafts and shipbuilding. I am somewhat constrained in this respect by the items sent in of course.

I am pleased that we have an ever wider number of contributors and topics, always feel free to send contributions, however short, to me at richardholme@btinternet.com or 7 Cedar Lodge Tunbridge Wells TN4 8BT.

Many thanks as ever to Nicholas Blake for his assistance in putting Dockyards together.

Richard Holme

Transactions: an update . . .

The NDS Committee apoligises for the delayed publication of Transactions 9.

Two issues combined to hinder production. First, we had to move from our previous excellent printers, who could not provide a competitive price compared with other printers with newer equipment. The Society sought to reduce the cost, which had risen three-fold since we began, to deliver value for money to our members. Secondly, we gained a new Editor in the person of Dr Philip MacDougall, because the redoubtable Professor Ray Riley had retired. So the search for a new printer and changing formats to meet the latest requirements has led to an overdue publication date, but members are gaining an ebook version which will be distributed by email at the same time and available online and for sale to non-
members once the new website is up and running.

Volume 9: Treason’s Harbours: Dockyards in Art, Literature and Film (2011 Conference),
Volume 10: Bermuda Dockyard and the War of 1812 (2012 Conference),

We have the funds to publish both Transactions 10 and 11 in 2015, so members’ allocated issues will be distributed next year.

Dr Ann Coats – Chairman

New NDS events for 2015

A series of expert-led walks and visits is being planned for 2015. Each walk/visit will take in areas of significance associated with naval shipbuilding and the civilian side of the navy. At least six of the walks/visits will be in the London area, with others planned for Portsmouth, Chatham and other naval towns.

The first of these walks will be led by Dr Philip MacDougall (author of the recently published London and the Georgian Navy) on the afternoon of Saturday 21 February and will last approximately two hours. The cost will be £2 for members and £5 for non-members. For those travelling a distance and wishing to make a day of it, suggestions will be made as to nearby connected sites that can be visited in the morning as well as where to eat locally.

The first of these walks will take in the right bank of the Thames as it runs past Rotherhithe, concentrating on the contribution made by the merchant shipyards of the area to the might of the Royal Navy. Rotherhithe, while being home to a vast number of former shipbuilding yards under contract to the navy, was also the final resting place of the Trafalgar battleship Temeraire, home to hundreds of skilled artisans, a hostelry much-frequented by Captain Cook and unsurprisingly a target of the hated press gangs. All this and much more will be explored in the first of the Naval Dockyards Society series of walks.

For details and a booking form, email philip.macdougall@btinternet.com or send an ssae to Philip MacDougall (62 Maybush Drive, Chidham, Chichester, West Sussex, PO18 8SS).

Plymouth and Devonport Revisited
Naval Dockyards Society Tour, September 2014

We were based at the attractive Grosvenor Hotel on Plymouth Hoe, reasonably priced and well located for all our destinations. We walked together to the Barbican to explore this historic area, which is once again thriving. We met up for a delicious fish and chips supper at Mitch Tonks’s new Rockfish Restaurant, situated on the waterfront at Sutton Harbour.

On Saturday we travelled to Devonport Naval Heritage Centre, where we were met by Bob Cook, in charge of Group Visits and Events. After a welcome cup of coffee we were shown a large scale wall-mounted model and were given a brief history of Devonport Dockyard by Keith Johnson, Coordinator of the Heritage Centre Volunteers, whose stamina on the day was greatly admired. Our walking tour of the Centre’s artefacts began with the figurehead collection, now rather restricted in the former Fire Station (1851), near Fore Gate. The star was King Billy, William IV, who as Duke of Clarence was Lord High Admiral 1827–8, thereby responsible for Royal William Victualling Yard, and then reigned 1830–7. He was the original figurehead on Royal William, 120 guns (1833), built at Pembroke Dock and converted to steam in 1860. He had been displayed at the easternmost point of South Yard, next to Mutton Cove, but was brought inside for refurbishment. A fibreglass copy now stands in its place. He was not mentioned by David Pulvertaft, presumably because he was refurbished after David’s authoritative study was written. David described Devonport’s, and other, naval figureheads which remain or have been lost or scattered, regretting their dispersal.

The stables section of the Fire Station housed a diverse Royal Navy display, including a model of Drake’s fleet, photographs and Holland I’s huge battery. À propos dockyard horses,
one visitor ‘recalled as a small boy in Devonport (late 1940s) seeing a string of horses mornings and evenings which I was told were going to/from their stables somewhere in Stoke (up the hill from us) to the Dockyard, where they pulled wagons. I do not remember them later (say 1950s). It was an era of petrol rationing and I do recall our milk and bread deliveries by horse drawn vehicles in the same period (1940s).’

We then visited the Pay Office (c. 1780), admiring the vaulted and fireproofed ground-floor ceiling, the elegant staircase, decorative covings, mantelpieces and doorways. We viewed a large model of Royal William Yard and displays of food, drink and clothing. We also viewed exhibits inside Gilroy House (the former Police Superintendent’s House) and some stonework fragments from the bombed St Lo’s Church.

Situated just inside of the old Fore Street Gate, the Royal Dockyard Chapel was the second oldest Church of England place of worship in the town of Devonport. It was damaged in the Blitz and demolished. The dockyard chapel was founded in 1700, just a short time after the commencement of the Royal dockyard, and bore an inscription that it was built ‘by the generous and pious contributions of officers and seamen belonging to a squadron of men-of-war paid off in this yard (after 10 years expensive war with France); being propagated and carried on by the energy and religious endeavours of George St Leo, Esquire, commissioner of the said yard, and comptroller of the said pay.’ It was forever after known as St Loe’s (sic) Church. The chapel had deteriorated so much that in September 1814 the order was given to have it demolished . . . in the meantime services had been transferred to the Ropehouses in South Yard. The foundation stone of the new Chapel was laid without ceremony on Thursday January 19th 1815 and was finally opened on November 9th 1817 (Plymouth City Council Archives, Reference 2021).

After lunching on oggies we split into two groups, one seeing the nuclear submarine HMS Courageous and the other given a select site tour and illustrated talks: ‘Widows of the Ropery’ and part of his ‘Crime and Punishment in 18th & 19th century Plymouth’, or as one visitor put it: experiencing the ‘finer points of hanging and the guillotine’. Our Courageous guide had served on the boat in the 1980s, so could add more than a mere description, which was itself enthralling. We saw how the 120-strong crew slept in sometimes very cold conditions, alongside the Tigerfish torpedoes and potatoes (plus, after ten weeks at sea, potato flies). Catering was very important to the morale of the crew, a meal being served every six hours to support the shifts, Saturdays marked as steak night, achieved on £1.78 a day per man.

Finally we boarded our coach for the dockyard tour, Keith giving the commentary as we saw in South Yard the Ropery, Slip No. 3, where the Dreadnoughts were constructed in the early twentieth century, the oldest covered Slip No. 1, the Scrieve Board, the Saw Mills and Blacksmith’s Shop (in a poor state of repair). In front of the remnant of the officers’ terrace we saw Dummer’s Dry Dock and Wet Basin, long missing the linking gates. West of this is the Victorian Dry Dock Pump House, and Dry Dock No. 4, which was the biggest in the world when opened by George III. Then we crossed the bridge linking South Yard to Morice Ordnance Yard, overlooking an old part of Devonport and the approach to the Torpoint Ferry, originally Tar Point: to careen and re-tar wooden hulls. At Morice Yard the magnificent limestone storehouses, magazine and officers’ terrace were built from stone quarried on site, levelled to construct the Ordnance wharf. In North Yard we passed the 1970s Frigate Sheds, the Factory and the Nuclear Refuelling Complex, the brutalist NAAFI Building and the new Weston Mill wharves. We finally viewed the majestic naval barracks of HMS Drake, including the latest building for Haslar Company, a rehabilitation centre for disabled personnel, and the Barracks’ own railway station. The railway line also linked North and South Yards by a tunnel, which when dug, revealed graves, thought possibly to date from the Civil War siege, as that area was the escarpment of the outer defences. Some air-raid shelters beneath the tunnel could survive.

On Sunday 7th while on the ferry from the Barbican to Royal William Yard we were very fortunate to have a commentary from our tour guide, Nigel Overton, Curator (City & Mari-
time Heritage), Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery, giving his description of the role of the historic Cattewater in sixteenth-century naval history. We viewed one of its remaining victualling stores, now a white pub by a slip, Mount Batten tower, built by Captain William Bat-

![image]

Customs House Barbican 1820 and King Billy figurehead
ten during the Civil War, the Royal Plymouth Corinthian Yacht Club which contains the Citadel’s sea basin and St Nicholas’s Island which held royalist prisoners after the Civil War, and the fort in Mount Edgcumbe across the Tamar. It was superb to pass the Horsley swing bridges (1833) into the harbour of the victualling yard, built by Sir John Rennie (1794–1874), who also built the Plymouth breakwater.

Nigel began his tour at the grand land gateway crowned by a statue of William IV, who, as the Duke of Clarence, commissioned the fourteen-acre yard with 1,500 feet of quayside. He described its transformation from its original 1834 configuration, through later uses, to present-day refurbishment as residences, restaurants and shops. We saw the Slaughterhouse, the Bakery, two officers’ houses built of granite and the Brewery, which was barely used for this purpose as the beer ration ended in 1831; from 1929 it was used as a torpedo works and store. Drum Avenue was covered over during the Crimean War to provide extra storage. The new Cooperage was built in 1899 of granite. Although a popular market was in progress we could still gain a feel for the grandeur and substance of Rennie’s magnificent buildings, built of granite and veined Plymouth limestone, quarried from the site. It was certainly a change from our last visit in May 2003 when the site was virtually empty of people. Melville, used as a sugar mill and chocolate store, is due to be restored as a hotel. We also went through the tunnel to Firestone Bay facing Plymouth, which would have provided an alternative sea access in adverse weather. Nigel showed us historic maps of the Plymouth and Devonport waterfronts dated 1539, 1825, 1848 and 1895.

As an optional extra instead of lunch, Nigel took some of us on a walk around Western King Point, climbing the new forty-foot flight of steps, criticised for piercing the retaining wall and spoiling the setting of Clarence Steps. The walk included the Henrician blockhouses and the restored Turncock’s cottage next to the former reservoir, closed in 1960. The foreshore and cliffs also form a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), exposing a complex series of grey and pink Devonian limestones.

After lunch we enjoyed a relaxed tour of Marine Barracks, Durnford St, Stonehouse, with Administrator Richard Fisher, enhanced by his collection of illustrations. After passing the elegant houses in Durnford Street, dating from the 1830s and rented out by the Edgcumbe family, we entered the Barracks gateway into the large parade ground. The first privates’ accommodation blocks, facing the gateway, and officers’ barracks either side were built between 1779 and 1785. The Admiralty decided it would be better for discipline, training and accessibility to have the marines in one place, ready to embark when required, rather than having to round them up from Plymouth. Outside the ‘dry’ barracks sprang up pubs and
brothels. In the 1860s the barracks were enlarged to hold families, a school, a chapel and a beer room. In the early days men were punished by being whipped in the parade ground or had to rake and roll the crushed limestone surface, then clean their uniforms for the next day. The Victorians imprisoned or fined the men instead. During the 1797 naval mutiny four men were overheard plotting to take over arms and were taken to the Citadel. They had to carry their coffins from there to the Hoe, where 2,500 people turned out to see them shot. We were enthralled by the Chapel, the 1831 Globe Theatre, built by subscription (within the shell of the eighteenth-century racquet court), said to have been modelled on London’s Crichton Theatre. The tour ended in the officers’ mess built in 1858 (to mimic the nearby Longroom ballroom, built for the Edgcumbe in 1756 by Sir Robert Taylor) with its fabulous collection of original portraits.

Finally, on Monday 8th we met Blue Badge Tour Guide Jane Dymock, at the Royal Citadel. She recounted that Drake’s artillery fort on the east of the Hoe had overlooked the mouth of the Cattewater. During the second Anglo-Dutch War (1665–7) Charles II sent the engineer Bernard de Gomme (1620–85) to survey Plymouth’s defences. He designed a five-bastioned fort in a style that the French engineer Vauban (1633–1707) would employ to greater extent on France’s land borders. It was built 1675–85 to include the earlier fort as a sixth bastion, plus a demi-bastion. Sir Thomas Fitch (or Fitz), an associate of Sir Christopher Wren, designed the magnificent Portland stone 1670 baroque gateway which includes a statue of Charles II as a Roman general, the royal coat of arms and the coat of arms of John Grenville (or Granville), first Earl of Bath (1628–1701), a close supporter of Charles II during the Civil War who became governor of Plymouth 1661–96, Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall 1660–96 and of Devon 1688/9–96, and a powerful West Country landowner.

We walked around the curtain wall and bastions, gaining wonderful views of Plymouth, the Harbour and the Sound. Chimneys pierced the ramparts from the rooms below. Cannon were aimed at the town and harbour, to protect from a land attack, and potentially unfriendly locals (Plymouth being Parliamentarian during the Civil War). We also saw a rusty gun (it costs £30K to restore a 32lb gun). Drake’s fort had enclosed a chapel used by fishermen and seamen. St Katherine’s Chapel on the Hoe 1667–1688 was built on the site of the fourteenth-century chapel, enlarged and partly rebuilt. In 1845 it was further enlarged in an Early Gothic style as soldiers were given more training, acquiring two galleries with wrought-iron balustrades, two side aisles to give it cruciform plan., a plastered ceiling and the doors; in the late nineteenth-century fittings including an octagonal pulpit were added.

On the parade ground is a full-length lead statue of George II, the last monarch to command the army in battle, in the costume of a Roman emperor, erected by Robert Pitt in 1728 and donated by Louis Dufour who commanded a company of Invalids or retired soldiers. Gun trophies from Waterloo and the Crimean War include the Alma Gun. The Citadel was refur-
bished during the 1890s–1900s by the architect T. Kitsel Rogers.

Some comments from those on the trip:

The guides on Saturday and Richard Fisher at the RM Barracks were particularly good.

Every aspect was so interesting and the speakers/guides were the best – that is they spoke clearly, knew their subject, were informative – laced with that touch of humour which engages.

The hotel was well located, was reasonably priced and had good facilities. Everything went very smoothly; the tours you arranged taking us to places we would not have got to on our own, and with the benefit of very knowledgeable guides.

This was my first dockyard visit, other than through Navy Days, and it was a thoroughly enjoyable, well-organised experience over several days. The hotel was pleasant and each event I found fascinating. The guides were knowledgeable and quite likeable. It was most enjoyable meeting new, like-minded people. Looking forward to the next one.

The quality of our visit was very much enhanced by the close liaison between Bob Cook, Nigel Overton (right) and Richard Fisher, who made every effort to ensure that we enjoyed the best possible experience. NDS is very grateful to all the guides, and to David Baynes, NDS Tour Organiser.

The end of South Yard as a naval entity?

Bob Cook had alerted NDS to the news that ‘Devonport’s unique naval museum could be moved into the heart of Plymouth as part of plans to create a £21m History Centre.’ Commodore Graham Little, the Devonport Naval Base Commander, supports the move (Plymouth Herald, 11 May 2014). In May 2014 Plymouth City Council was awarded £12.5m from HLF to refurbish and extend the City Library and Museum and Art Gallery (Plymouth Herald, 27 May 2014). However, there is no guarantee that the proposed City Museum development will be large enough to embrace the complete collection.

This future removal of Plymouth Naval Base Museum will end public access entirely from South Yard; historic buildings are already surrounded by intrusive wire fencing and vistas impeded by the large Princess Yachts ship sheds. It may be surmised that this is not unlinked to further moves to remove South Yard altogether from the naval estate. A City Deal (Plymouth and the South West Peninsula City Deal) threatens further the vulnerable historic structures of South Yard, where North and South Smitheries and the Sawmills are on the English Heritage Buildings at Risk Register and South Yard is not currently included in a Conservation Area nor covered by a Conservation Management Plan. In January 2014 a Plymouth City Deal sought ‘to unlock land at South Yard in Devonport Naval Base.’ (Marine News, 20 January 2014). More recently, in June 2014 it was announced that: ‘The Plymouth office of engineering, construction and technical services business URS will work with a group of sub-consultants including LHC Architects, property consultancy Alder King and construction consultancy Ward Williams Associates on the scheme. They will soon begin in-depth site investigations as a first step towards coming up with detailed proposals for the release of the South Yard site at Devonport Naval Base and its conversion into a new marine industries hub.’ (Insider Media Ltd, 19 June 2014)

This may well be the last time the NDS visits Devonport Dockyard.
Further information

Devonport Naval Heritage Centre, devonportnavalheritage@gmail.com


Plymouth City Council Archives, Reference 2021, http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/archivescatalogue?record%3D996%26cid%3Dssl1ap45pfhyg55dgg1ytq4%26criteria%3Ddockyard

‘Plymouth Dock – Yard’ DVD, includes a bonus DVD on ‘Devonport Past and Present’, price £12.99 + postage and package of £1.50 via rayandmary@talktalk.net. All proceeds to Plymouth Naval Base Museum


Tourist Information Centre, 3–5 The Barbican, PL1 2LR

Wills, M. (July 2009). Devonport Dockyard Museums. Dockyards, 14/1, pp. 6–7

Dr Ann Coats

Addendum by Dr Celia Clark

Keith Johnson of the Devonport Naval Heritage Centre museum gave a moving lecture, ‘The Widows of the Ropery’, about the employment of women in the Ropery, which began in the late nineteenth century. A photograph dated 1891 of twelve widows and their daughters, ‘The Widows Of The Ropery’, in the collection is evidence of long standing employment of women as rope-making-machine minders for the steam-powered machinery driven from overhead line shafts. To qualify, they had either to be widows of sailors, marines or dockyardmen – for whom there were as yet no pension arrangements – or their daughters. The collection also includes letters from widows asking for dockyard employment. The woman with three stripes on her uniform is the matron and the one with two stripes her deputy. Another photograph shows that some were mere girls of twelve or fourteen, working with noisy machines for six days a week. Research by Keith Johnson in the census and burial records has identified several individuals with ages ranging from fifty-four to twenty-two. Charlotte Sullivan aged fifty-four, who lived nearby in Stoke Dameral, was described in the 1891 census as ‘Matron (Ropery) Dockyard’, and Jessie Merrett aged forty-four as ‘Hemp Spinner HM Ropery’. Most of these women lived close to their work, and although some lived to eighty or ninety, some were buried in the cheapest graves: ‘Common Grass’ (Ford Park Cemetery Trust http://www.ford-park-cemetery.org Grave Notes for Plot: GLB 21 7).

A guide to Plymouth, Stonehouse and Devonport published in 1914 describes the Ropery: ‘where practically all the ropes used in the Navy are made, for the output at the Chatham ropery, the only other Government establishment of the kind, is very small. A special
order is required to enter this building, where the making of rope can be watched from the
time when the flax is sorted and passed through the spinning jennies, tended by women,
until it reaches the department where it is made into great ropes, all with the thin red twine,
the Government trade mark, running through them.’

Open time at Sheerness!

On 17 September, I was glad to attend an inaugural event at the Dockyard Church at Sheerness run by the newly formed Sheerness Dockyard Preservation Trust (‘SDPT’) – see www.sheernessdockyardpt.org.uk. We reported in Dockyards last year that the Spitalfields Trust had acquired the derelict church and now will be passing ownership to SDPT, which at the time of the visit was in the course of being legally constituted and seeking formal Charity Commission approval and registration.

For the first time in many a year the shell of the church was opened to the public and it was heartening to see long queues of local residents awaiting their turn to inspect it. I gather that around five hundred people came along and these included parties from local schools who were briefed on the Church and its context in the Dockyard. Hard hats and hi-vis jackets were necessary of course for health and safety reasons for those undertaking the tour. There is no question of the church being restored to its original architectural form (e.g. as at Pembroke Dock) or being used for religious purposes, and representatives of SDPT were handing
out questionnaires to canvass opinion for its future use. Stated alternatives include space or
studios for small businesses and creative industries, a cafe, performance/rehearsal space, a
eritage display and housing for the 1820 Dockyard Model presently stored at Fort Brock-
hurst at Gosport. Sadly perhaps these proposals are likely to mean insertion of a mezzanine
floor in the church, however at least they will secure its future.

Progress on restoration of houses in the former Officers’ Quarters by parties connected
with the Spitalfields Trust seemed to be going well. We chatted to the owners of the Boat-
swain’s House, who seemed more than happy with their purchase and restoration work.

Earlier we had been glad to visit the excellent Bluetown Heritage Centre. A new attrac-
tion in progress of being constituted is a replica of the gun deck of HMS Victory, which was
fitted out at Chatham after being launched at Chatham in 1765.

Richard Holme (acknowledgements to Nicole Clifton)

Venice Conference report

The second international conference on Defence Sites, Heritage and Future, following the
first, held in Portsmouth UK in 2012, took place in the elegantly restored Porto Nuova Mast
Sheer tower in the northern part of the historic Arsenale in Venice from 17 to 19 September.
It was organised by the Wessex Institute of Technology and the Arsenale of Venezia.

The conference objective was to increase knowledge of the scale, design and functions
of defence sites, and to deepen understanding of the implications of different disposal pro-
cesses for state-owned land, the issues raised by its redundancy and the search for sustain-
able new land uses to bring benefits to formerly defence dependent areas.

As defence priorities change, new weapons technology develops and political maps are
redrawn, a huge variety of buildings and sites – barracks, training grounds, forts, arsenals,
armouries, and naval and air-force bases – are becoming redundant in different parts of the
world. State land is disposed of in many different ways, ranging from sale to the highest bid-
der to free transfer to new community users. Former defence sites present new owners with
difficult challenges: decontamination, new infrastructure, funding, physical adaptation and
negotiation over different countries’ conservation regimes. This conference explored these
issues, focusing on innovative examples of sustainable new life in these often symbolically
important sites.

Heritage tourism may place unacceptable pressures on fragile sites, so that visitors’ ex-
perience needs to be carefully managed in order not to damage historic structures or ecolo-
y. Understanding and respecting a defence site’s history and significance are essential to
appropriate new use, but its potential may not be recognised or respected. Some sites once
dedicated to national security are being transformed by artistic activity, via rededication of
whole sites, conversion of individual military buildings, and the construction of new galleries
in former defence enclaves, temporary installations, festivals and arts events. Remote sites
may need new infrastructure in order to reconnect them with the civilian world, but coun-
tries with economic pressures may find financing new roads, ferries, services and interpreta-
tion hard to fund, or they may overwhelmed by the sheer weight of their historic defence
legacy.

Exchanges of experience on these and many other aspects of the transfer to civilian life
was a key feature of this second conference. Most appropriately, it took place in the Venetian
Arsenale, once the economic engine of the Republic’s prosperity, now being carefully re-
stored and used for exhibitions such as the international Biennales of Art and Architecture
and for skilled job creation and research.

Delegates from across the world explored the development of military architecture in-
cluding castles and forts right up to the Cold War. The Royal Engineers’ standard building
types adapted for local climates in Tasmania, Sydney and Norfolk island are so well con-
structed that many are in active civilian use. The evolution of state attitudes to defence her-
itage in Holland, from indifference to the community inspired preservation of Naarden and
the Dutch Waterline was documented. As far as the Swedish property service is concerned there is complete equality between the Swedish royal palace and Cold War forts. In Sweden and in Oman there are measures to increase public access to secret or inaccessible places. The United States Naval Communication Station in Thurso is developing as a business park, though successive owners have found change difficult to finance. Only one part of the historic city of Jeddah is being preserved, the rest having been swept away. Dense defence installations in Kinmen Island Taiwan very close to the Chinese mainland once housing over 100,000 servicemen have mostly been closed or demolished, though a few were turned into museums or memorial halls by the government to attract tourists. The departments of Culture and Tourism in Croatia have divergent objectives, making restoration and reuse of the circle of forts around the dockyard in Pula very difficult. The tourist potential of the Spanish forts around the harbour in Valdivia Chile, now in the hands of the local authorities, is not recognised. An American speaker from the Cato Institute in Washington DC whose title was Creative Destruction lauded the positive effect of new civilian land uses on local economies, citing Bergstrom Air Force Base which replaced a dangerous local airport, Dupont’s first gunpowder mills in Wilmington Delaware, now the firm’s huge research base, and Brooklyn Navy Yard in New York.

Many interesting new contacts were made. Discussions are beginning about holding the next conference in Alicante, Spain.

Dr Celia Clark
Dockyards, November 2014

‘Temporary Men’ at Portsmouth, 1914–18

New Theatre Royal Archivist Donna Bish has been working with Portsmouth Academy for Girls, Priory School and Portsmouth High School in a Portsmouth City Council funded project to research the role of Portsmouth women as ‘Temporary Men’ during the First World War. The aim is to celebrate the stories of these women’s lives and their contributions to the war through different art forms, which was exhibited on the First Floor of Portsmouth Central Library from 11 to 15 November.

Donna’s research into the lives of these women has enabled her to build up a clear picture of who they and their families were, where they lived and what happened to them after the war. Three women stand out: Hertha Ayrton, the Portsea born scientist and inventor who invented the Ayrton anti-gas fan which was used prolifically in the War; Yvonne Evans, granddaughter of Portsea Alderman Henry Evan and the first Portsmouth woman to register with the WRNS; and Beatrice Hobby, a Portsea lady who worked in the Dockyard for much of the war after her husband was killed in action. Students from Portsmouth High School are devising a new performance based on the lives of these women.

Working closely with Priory School, Donna is also researching the school’s role as the headquarters of the 5th Southern General Hospital. She has already identified over a hundred named TFNS and VAD nurses and support workers, and is helping the students research their own ancestors’ roles in the War.

The Exhibition, ‘“Temporary Men” Portsmouth Women in the First World War’, will display the students’ art, written and performance work as well as historical information and photos. A list of names of Portsmouth’s ‘Temporary Men’ and their individual roles will be published on the New Theatre Royal website (www.newtheatreroyal.com), and if you have any stories of your Portsmouth maternal ancestors Donna would love to hear from you. Please email donna@newtheatreroyal.com.

Shoreham Fort, prototype for Fort Nelson, Portsmouth

In May 2014, Ann Coats and I met up with Gary Baines and Sharon Penfold who are leading a marvellous campaign by the Friends of Shoreham Fort (a registered charity, 1147869) to conserve, maintain and restore the brick Victorian fort at Shoreham-by-Sea in West Sussex.

On a lovely warm sunny afternoon Gary and Sharon gave us a detailed tour and explained their continuing efforts to reinstate for example, the Barrack Block which was demolished in 1959 and which once completed will be available for community use. Surrounded on three sides by water (the sea and the River Adur), the fort was completed in June 1857 as tensions with France were mounting. It took just six months to build.

Shoreham Fort

It served as a prototype for the larger and more elaborate Palmerston Forts, including Fort Nelson and others on Portsdown Hill and in the Solent, forming a ring around Ports-
mouth. It was itself a development of the design of Littlehampton Fort, correcting many of the initial design flaws. Littlehampton Fort has little structure remaining as its barrack block was blown up, taking a majority of the fort out with it. What is left is now largely covered by sand dunes and ivy — Shoreham Fort’s design is therefore unique.

The design itself is rather clever. It was built to look obsolete, mimicking a gun battery from the 1760s. The enemy could not see the fifteen foot sheer drop or the Carnot Wall with its rifle loops for the soldiers and their Martini-Henry rifles. This would lead the French to believe that the guns were old smooth bore cannons and of short range, approximately 800 yards, where in fact the fort had the first Palliser conversion rifle-barrelled 64lb cannons which could actually fire up to 4,000 yards.

Shoreham Fort can also be linked to the Charge of the Light Brigade on 25 October 1854 during the Battle of Balaclava in the Crimean War, through Martin Leonard Landfried, who retired at Shoreham Fort. He was the bandmaster of the 1st Sussex Artillery Volunteers. He is buried in Hove Cemetery and on his gravestone is the inscription

Here lies a soldier of the king and of the King of Kings Martin Leonard Landfried who from his 15th year served his country in the 17th Lancers at Sevastopol, the Alma, Balaclava — sounding the charge at the latter engagement – and in the Indian Mutiny and retiring as Trumpet Major in 1865 joined the 1st Sussex RGA (Vols) becoming bandmaster in 1890. Born 25th August 1834 died 8th December 1902. God grant that he may sleep from Last Post to Reveille. This monument was raised by the officers and non com officers and gunners 1st Sussex RGA (Vols).

Shoreham Fort was also the location of the first film studio. Francis Lyndhurst, grandfather to Nicholas Lyndhurst the well-known British actor, was a set designer who came down from London to Shoreham looking for a location which did not suffer London smog. His company, Sealite, produced four or five silent movies at Shoreham Fort, hanging their canvasses on the high barrack block and utilising the earthen ramparts to protect against the wind. The success of the films meant that a purpose built ‘glasshouse studio’ could be built a little further up the beach, behind the Church of the Good Shepherd. It is widely believed that but for the outbreak of the First World War that Shoreham would have in fact become Hollywood by the Sea.

The fort was used again in 1957 for the filming of the Battle of the V.1, starring Christopher Lee.

The Second World War saw huge modifications to Shoreham Fort with the addition of enormous housings on top of the gun emplacements for the 6in guns. With these guns came the introduction of two aiming light stations, one of which still stands and has been restored by the National Coastwatch Institution (http://www.nci.org.uk/). This station is manned by volunteers who keep a watchful eye over the harbour mouth and the sea. Anti-aircraft guns were installed, anti-tank blocks ran the length of the coastline and the harbour was armed with five mines. If Britain was invaded two throw switches would have been used to blow up the harbour mouth. One was located in an observation tower built on top of the western
magazine of the existing fort and one was in the south caponier.

The site of the Fort is owned by the Shoreham Port Authority, which has given full support and encouragement with some financial backing to the Friends.

One new feature of the fort is a Nissen hut, formerly used as a dwelling by two elderly ladies in Chidham, near Chichester. These ladies were Land Army girls during the Second World War and ran a smallholding for most of their lives. The Nissen hut housed the Canadian soldiers who were manning the anti-aircraft station and it has been placed at Shoreham on original Second World War Nissen hut bases. The hut was offered to the Friends gratis in October 2013 on the basis that they dismantled it and cleared the site by Christmas, which was done by 22 December. There were difficulties in moving and re-erecting the hut at the fort but this was eventually achieved in March 2014. The Hut now houses a small exhibition and education area. Details: www.shorehamfort.co.uk and www.facebook.com/shorehamfort.

There are fortnightly open days on Sundays and guided tours are available to groups if pre-booked, see website for details. Continuous research is being conducted about Shoreham Fort and the Friends hope to produce a DVD in the not too distant future. A visit is highly recommended, especially when the Friends are there because you can make the most of the tea and cake from their little tea hut, Food for Fort.

Richard Holme (with extensive contribution by Gary Baines and Sharon Penfold and Ann Coats)

Malta revisited: a broader renaissance unfolds

Richard Holme’s article two years ago (Dockyards, November 2012) documented the then equivocal state of revitalisation in Malta’s Dockyard Creek, in light of which it was a pleasure to read in Conrad Thake’s account (Dockyards, June 2014) that Number One Dock’s environs in Cospicua really have at last been refurbished – even though the Knights’ and British Buildings await restoration. And so it proved, upon inspection in July 2014: there is even a landscaped flight of steps leading down to the Creek between the two unrestored buildings, and the longstanding dream of a landscaped, historically referential, path around the Creek’s circumference is tantalisingly close to realisation.

It is essential to see these developments within the larger context of Grand Harbour and Valletta and their broader revitalisation, however. For years the potential of Dockyard Creek and its surrounding Three Cities/Cottonera have been frustrated by the virtual absence of water transport across Grand Harbour from Valletta: as the NDS 2007 Conference visitors will remember well, the dockyard district viewed from Valletta’s ramparts has long been so near and yet so far, requiring a tedious bus circuit right around Grand Harbour to reach it. The gondola-like djhaisas which once ferried the navy across from Valletta nearly died after its withdrawal; and the Malta Tourism Authority’s worthy attempts to revive them several years
ago, as a culturally appropriate transport means, were clearly inadequate for any large-scale transport of residents and tourists. To our delight in July 2014, Elaine and I found astonishing progress since our last visit in 2010, in the revitalisation of both sides of Grand Harbour – and, at last, effective connection between them.

Professor Gregory Ashworth (University of Groningen, Netherlands) and I had written extensively a decade ago on Malta's tourism challenges, and returned with our wives this past summer to present ‘keynotes’ at a tourism conference, organised by the Universities of Malta and Westminster to mark fifty years of Malta’s independence. This provided the opportunity in the first instance to review the progress of Valletta’s revitalisation. With European financial assistance, the main eyesores remaining from 1940s bombing and reconstruction are rapidly disappearing: the City Gate has been strikingly restructured and in its vicinity the Opera House ruins have become an open-air theatre, and a new Parliament House is nearing completion.

When one overcomes astonishment and walks across to the Upper Barrakka Gardens overlooking Grand Harbour, where the populace watched the Axis-battered Ohio limp past on that fateful August day seventy-two years ago, further amazement is in store. After reviewing the noon-day gun, restored some years ago, I walked to the side of the Upper Barrakka rampart to inspect the site of the long-vanished lift, which had once brought pedestrians from the harbourside up to Valletta – and in utter disbelief, I found it rebuilt! Moreover, it connects with a frequent ferry service across the harbour to Dockyard Creek; the ferry permits inspection of Fort (ex-HMS) St. Angelo’s refurbishment and the super-marina on
Vittoriosa’s waterfront, and passes (can it be?) a recreation of the Macina’s sheer-legs on the Senglea shore, before it docks far up the Creek on Cospicua’s waterfront. So not only is that waterfront in active restoration – people can actually get there! These critical improvements were undoubtedly motivated by the needs of the burgeoning cruise activity in Grand Harbour, which of course can play a large part in naval heritage tourism, provided it is effectively marketed.

There is more of naval consequence, however. Mario Farrugia, the dynamic director of Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna (Malta Heritage Trust), who is responsible for restoring the noon-day gun along with much else, serendipitously re-met Elaine and me there and took us through the warren of caverns in the ramparts below, which were used by the wartime military command and are earmarked for museum restoration, in addition to the Lascaris War Rooms at the foot of the ramparts which FWA is currently upgrading. In due course, therefore, NDS members will find even more to interest them before they descend the lift and cross Grand Harbour on the ferry – and if they do so today, they will already find the FWA’s Malta at War Museum in Vittoriosa’s gate complex above the ferry terminal; it is concerned primarily with the honeycomb of underground bomb shelters in which the Maltese people survived the 1940–43 Axis Siege, but it has recently been expanded to present much of naval interest – apart from the bombing itself which was, of course, directed at the dockyard.
Prior to this decade there was already much of naval heritage tourism interest in the vicinity of Grand Harbour – the War Museum in Fort St. Elmo, the nearby Siege Memorial, the Maritime Museum on Dockyard Creek, Fort Rinella. Much remains dormant, such as the naval prison and Capuccini cemetery (see my article in Dockyards, May 2011); the knottiest problem of restoring and reusing the Knights’ and British Buildings on Dockyard Creek remains; and one can quibble over past delays in public-sector action. But what this decade is adding to the effective naval heritage resource, to the broader revitalisation context in which it should be seen, and to its economic development value for both sides of Grand Harbour, might fairly be considered to do credit to a small country and to mark well its fiftieth anniversary.

John Tunbridge
(Emeritus Professor, Carleton University, Canada and Curtin University, Australia)

**Occupational hazard at Chatham Dockyard post-1945**

Before its closure in 1984, Chatham Dockyard was one of the most significant employers in the Medway Towns of Chatham, Gillingham and Rochester. Indeed, some workers, especially apprentices, commuted from North Kent and as far away as the Kent coast to work in the Dockyard. The Speed Report compared it to major employers like Vauxhall Motors, Metal Box and the National Freight Corporation.¹ Employing between 6,000 and 14,500 workers per annum between 1900 and 1984, the Dockyard had a profound impact on the development of the surrounding towns and villages and on the people who worked there. Its closure in 1984 entailed the loss of some 7,000 jobs and brought an end to a relationship with the British state that had defined and shaped the economy, society and culture of the locality for over four hundred years. While it unquestionably brought educational and economic benefits to the region, the Dockyard was a dangerous place to work and left a legacy of occupational illness, which continues to affect the lives of former workers thirty years after its closure.

My recently submitted PhD thesis was a response to the lack of significant published work in relation to the Dockyard and occupational health after 1945.² By its very nature the study combined the official with the personal and so life history sources were employed to establish the Dockyard’s culture and the impact of occupational hazards, injury and disease on the worker. This article looks very briefly at some of the findings of my study.

Shipbuilding has been defined as one of the most dangerous industries in England and Scotland, alongside coal mining and construction.³ In the 1970s, the Factory Inspectorate recorded higher accident rates in the shipbuilding, ship-repairing and marine engineering industries than those recorded in manufacturing and construction.⁴ Chatham Dockyard primarily engaged in ship-repairing and refitting activities in the post-1945 period, which were arguably more dusty and dangerous than building new vessels. This was certainly the case with asbestos fitting and removal and with refitting and refuelling nuclear submarines. The risks present at the Dockyard in the post-1945 period combined traditional ones, such as falls from height, falling objects, hernias and foreign bodies in the eyes, with new ones introduced as a result of technological advances and different working methods. Industrial workers toiled with heavy machinery, with sharp tools, in confined spaces, in dock bottoms or at

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height, near welding sparks and flying debris. Robert Smith, a fitter apprentice from 1958 to 1962, remembered fitting pipes in a submarine’s compensation tanks:

. . . they stink to high heaven as a heavy residue of [fuel oil] cannot be completely removed, and the ventilation is inadequate . . . The only entrance or exit from these tanks is via a manhole cover, oval in shape and approximately 18" (less than 50cm) at its largest point. After half an hour in these tanks you had to get out into the fresh air to clear your head. This in itself was a difficult exercise, almost as if the submarine was giving birth! A couple of wandering leads were all the light available, and these were only permitted once the tanks had been subject to a ‘gas free’ test, to ensure that all the explosive gases inside the tanks had been extracted.\(^5\)

Working in certain jobs brought workers into close contact with asbestos, nuclear radiation and other toxic substances. Incidence of asbestos-related diseases among former Chatham Dockyard workers contributed to Medway’s unenviable position as the region with the second highest rate of deaths caused by mesothelioma in England and Wales in 2012.\(^6\) Workers afloat were often in close proximity to deep water or steep drops, depending on whether the docks were in a flooded or dry state.\(^7\) The Dockyard newspaper, Periscope, recorded the collapse of staging during work on HMS Kirkliston. Luckily the four workers who were thrown from the staging landed in a dock full with water and were not seriously injured.\(^8\) Conditions were frequently extremely hot or extremely cold and they were dirty, dusty and noisy. Fitter and turner Phillip Lewing recalled working on the refit of HMS Chichester during the winter of 1963:

It started snowing on Boxing Day and the snow and ice was still around at Easter 3 months later. During this time we were in dry dock where large areas of the ship’s plates, from just above the waterline down to the keel were removed for renewal. It was extremely cold and the wind whistled through the ship, the temperature rarely got above freezing. We had to bounce our tool bags on the deck in the morning because the spanners had froze [sic] and stuck together overnight. We just got on with, it came with the job.

Lewing also observed:

Gangs of men working afloat would . . . set up ‘home’ in any available compartment [of the ship] including engine room and boiler rooms, sometimes knee deep in asbestos lagging . . . The men would relocate to different parts of the ship as the refit progressed finally moving ashore when the job finished.\(^9\)

Of the former workers who contributed to the study, through interviews and questionnaires, many suffered from one or more work-related conditions, including asbestos-related diseases, industrial deafness, loss of sight, claustrophobia, arthritis of the spine and allergies.\(^10\) The few Hurt Books that have survived in the Royal Dockyard Library provided further examples of the conditions that men and women worked in.\(^11\) Workers who sustained injury during work were often put on restricted duties until they had fully recovered; some with permanent disabilities were on restricted duties indefinitely. In 1965, 249 men, or 3% of the Dockyard workforce, were on restricted duties due to injuries or disability sustained at

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\(^7\) The term ‘afloat’ refers to work aboard ships rather than in a workshop.

\(^8\) Periscope, May 1966, p1.

\(^9\) Taaffe, We suffered in silence, p70.

\(^10\) Taaffe, We suffered in silence, p71.

\(^11\) Physical injuries sustained in the Dockyards were referred to as ‘hurts’ and the workers who suffered them were entered on ‘hurt lists’ or in ‘hurt books’. Men suffering from illness or injuries not sustained in the Dockyards were entered on the ‘sick list’.
work. Foreign bodies and substances in eyes were also very common. In the most serious cases, loss of sight occurred. At just eighteen years old shipwright Norman Gifford lost the sight in one eye. Gifford’s trade union fought on his behalf to save his position and even won him time to study for a promotion to the Drawing Office; presumably this was considered to be work that was of the least risk to his functioning eye. This action falls within the typical activity of trades unions, whose ‘main rationale was to represent their members’ interests, and this frequently meant that wages and working hours were prioritised over occupational health matters. Hence, efforts to maintain Gifford’s employment were a priority, but it was unlikely that any fuss was made about the provision of eye protection for workers.

While the work itself could be perilous, the risks to workers were increased by competing priorities that impacted on the level of protection afforded to workers and masculine culture among workers; and where legislation and Admiralty/MoD policy sought to address risks, these efforts were frequently hampered by communication failure, gaps in knowledge and poor management decisions. Further, these factors combined reflect Paap’s unofficial cultural rules whereby violation of safety regulations is unofficially encouraged in order to achieve a wider aim; in the case of the Dockyards, getting vessels repaired and/or refitted and then back in service in order to achieve national security. This was particularly pertinent for the nuclear submarines on patrol for Cold War threats and undoubtedly contributed to the occurrence of radiation-induced cancers among the men who had refitted and refuelled them.

One intention of my research has been to open a discourse on occupational health and safety in the Royal Dockyards and I would welcome any thoughts or comments from others interested in this area of history.

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13 Group interview: G2003/3

Dr Emma Taaffe

2014 – The Bicentenary of Pembroke Dockyard!

Pembroke Dockyard was established in 1814 at Paterchurch on the south shore of Milford Haven near the old town of Pembroke. Pembroke Dock, the town which grew up round the new royal yard, has celebrated its bicentenary this year with events centred on the splendidly restored old Royal Dockyard Chapel.

The chapel, designed by George Ledwell Taylor and completed in 1834–35, is now the town’s Heritage Centre, which records the naval, military and air force history of Pembroke Dock. The centre was formally opened by Her Majesty the Queen, accompanied by HRH the Duke of Edinburgh, in April this year.

An important feature of this year’s celebrations has been the publication of a new bicentennial history of Pembroke Dockyard and the ships built there, written by naval historian and NDS member Lawrie Phillips. *Pembroke Dockyard and the Old Navy* was launched at the Dockyard Chapel in March by former First Sea Lord, Admiral Baron West of Spithead.

The book of 350 pages comprises a short history of the development of Pembroke Dockyard through to its closure in 1926. The bulk of the book is devoted to all 260 Pembroke-built ships, which included five royal yachts, with their technical details and careers. It concludes with the stories of the Dockyard personnel, from captain superintendents down to the hands-on workers. The whole is illustrated with 170 monochrome images and 48 pages of colour which show charts, plans, views and drawings of the Dockyard at various stages of its
history, pictures of Dockyard officers, historic relics and paintings and photographs of many of its ships.

In his Foreword, Admiral West notes that before the Dockyard was established in rural south Pembrokeshire, ‘the horse-drawn plough had been the most advanced piece of machinery’ known to the locality. ‘Yet within twenty years Pembrok men, hitherto tied to the land and traditional rural pursuits from time out of mind, were building major British warships and they did so for another hundred years’.

The Dockyard had its origins in a private building yard at Milford which was taken over by the Navy Board when Jacobs, the contractors, failed. Milford would have survived as a Royal Dockyard had the Navy Board been able to agree terms with Robert Greville, the landowner. However, with the completion of HMS Rochfort the operation moved up the harbour to Paterchurch, where land was already owned by the Ordnance Board.

Lawrie Phillips is clearly proud of the achievements of his shipbuilding forefathers but he gives full credit to the early influx of West Country shipwrights, almost all Wesleyan Methodists, Cornishmen and Devonians, who brought with them professional shipwright expertise. They constituted the most significant migration into south Pembrokeshire since the arrival of Flemish weavers in the twelfth century. They also introduced new family names which survive to this day.

As the new Dockyard was built on a greenfield site there was no local town to provide accommodation and the problem of a dispersed workforce was never resolved. Men travelling eight or ten miles to work arrived fatigued. An Order in Council in 1841 authorised the expense of a horse for the Dockyard Surgeon to visit sick workmen living in remote villages.

The Dockyard Surgeon was still doing his rounds on horseback at the turn of the twentieth century. Surgeon T. T. Jeans records some humour from his rounds. He records that as he rode up a lane towards a ‘sick’ dockyarder’s cottage he would see over the hedge ‘the poor, ‘sick’ man busy hoeing his ground. He would hear the horse’s hoof, look up, catch sight of me and dash for his cottage and his bed, where after listening to a long-winded account of his ailments from his wife and hearing the thump of his boots on the floor overhead, I would find him probably fully-dressed but minus those boots’.

The first Pembroke-built ships were the frigates HMS Valorous and Ariadne, launched in 1816. The latter was Captain Frederick Marryat’s last command. There followed a stream of warships, great and small: Franklin’s ill-fated former bomb HMS Erebus in 1826, the first-rate HMS Royal William (1833), Seppings’ HMS Rodney (1833) and Symonds’ HMS Vanguard (1835), and the steam frigates HMS Gorgon (1837) and HMS Cyclops (1839). The first of three royal yachts named Victoria and Albert was launched in 1843, the second in 1855 and Sir William White’s screw yacht in 1899.

The Royal Navy’s last paddle frigate HMS Valorous was launched in 1851 and the great three-decker HMS Duke of Wellington (ex-Windsor Castle) in 1853. One of the last two wooden three-decked first-rate line-of-battle ships, HMS Howe followed in 1860. Pembroke Yard produced some of the famous early ironclads such as HMS Prince Consort (1862), HMS Research (1863), HMS Zealous and HMS Lord Clyde (1864) and HMS Penelope (1867).

The launch of the famous turret battleship HMS Thunderer in 1872 was followed by some of the familiar names of the later Victorian battle fleet – including HMS Shannon (1875), the unsuccessful HMS Ajax (1880) and HMS Edinburgh (1882). During the next decade followed the battleships HMS Collingwood (1882), HMS Howe (1885), HMS Anson (1886), HMS Nile (1888), HMS Empress of India (1891) and her sister ship HMS Repulse a year later, and Jackie Fisher’s HMS Renown in 1895. The facilities at Pembroke, however, could no longer cope with increasing size of the pre-Dreadnoughts and the final battleship, HMS Hannibal, went down the ways in 1896. Production of protected, armoured and light cruisers occupied Pembroke up to, and during, the Great War.

Franklin D. Roosevelt when Assistant Secretary of the United States Navy, visited Pembroke Dockyard in July 1918. He thought it
an old, small affair somewhat like our Portsmouth [New Hampshire] Navy Yard . . . It had been expanded since the War from 1,000 to nearly 4,000 employees and does mostly repair work to patrol vessels etc and is also building four submarines. I was particularly interested to see over 500 women employed in various capacities . . . and all of them doing excellent work.

With the end of the war Pembroke’s days were numbered. The burning down of the mould loft in 1922 was a fatal blow. A vigorous but unsuccessful campaign was mounted in the early 1920s to save the yard. Rosyth was also threatened. But the reality was spelled out by David Beatty, the First Sea Lord, at the Lord Mayor’s Banquet in 1925: ‘Whether these Yards are necessary for naval purposes, the Admiralty is the only competent judge. As to whether they are necessary for political or social reasons is for the Government to decide. The fact is, that so far as the upkeep of the Fleet is concerned, they are entirely redundant’.


Richard Holme/Lawrie Phillips

**Eighteenth-century riggers’ stocks still at work in 2014**

I was lucky enough to be able to visit the Rigging House at Devonport Dockyard this summer – a return visit, my last being in 1997. As always I was interested in the riggers’ stocks which I wrote about in *Dockyards* (vol. 17 no. 1. May 2012), I remarked on the fact that some blocks only 5ft 8in long were used by one man whilst the 12ft long ones serve two riggers. ‘Ah!’ my informant said, ‘they came from “South Yard”.’ Now as I understand it South Yard Rigging House was built circa 1788 (J. Coad, *Historic Architecture of H.M. Naval Base Devonport 1689–1850*. National Maritime Museum London 1983 p. 360.) I think therefor that it is not unreasonable to suggest that the short blocks in use at Devonport Rigging House in 2014 first saw service in the late eighteenth century.

The white rope is used in conjunction with the vice when splicing wire. The vice which has a revolving head (right) is far more modern; they are made by Swindens and were first supplied to the MOD in 1930.

Des Pawson
Clothing the British sailor, 1760–98

ADM 49/35, held at the National Archives, is a book of contracts for clothing. These required the items to be delivered to the King’s Slop Warehouse in Crutched Friars.

Most of the contracts between 1777 and 1788 were with a Mr Wadden, who supplied frocks at 2s 9 ½d each, ‘trowsers’ at 2s 5d per pair, jackets at 6s each and shirts at 2s 10 ½d each. A contract dated 3 July 1781 was for shirts which were to be ‘well and substantially made ’of good strong linen, of blue and white 7/8 inch check, 3 feet 4 inches long in the body (without the collar), and with sleeves 20 inches long, cut in one piece but with a separate 10 inch wrist band. There were to be two buttonholes at the collar, and two at the wrist. The contract ran for twelve months certain and six months’ notice if continued. Over the first twelve months, Mr Wadden delivered a total of 147,000 shirts, in fortnightly batches.

Other contracts listed blue kersey unlined jackets and waistcoats in three different sizes, unlined breeches, worsted stocking at 2s per pair, white marine shirts, worsted caps, haversacks for seamen at 2s 3d, linen drawers, linen waistcoats at 2s 4d, and shoes at 3s 5 ½ d per pair. A later contract increased the price of shoes by 3d. Of each 100 pairs, 4 were to be size 10, 30 size 9, 30 size 8 and 30 size 7; this, together with the sizes stated for the frocks and trowsers gives us a useful indication of the size of sailors, although some of the smaller items might have been intended for boys.

Dr Janet Macdonald

SS Nomadic, Titanic’s little sister – the only remaining White Star Line vessel in the world

At the close of the nineteenth century Belfast was the industrial capital of the world with some of the largest factories – tobacco (Gallaghers), engineering (Mackies), Belfast Rope-works, aircraft manufacture (Short Brothers, now Bombardier) and shipbuilding (Harland and Wolff and Workman Clark). Harland and Wolff were the world leaders in shipbuilding and built all the White Star Line ships, which included RMS Olympic, RMS Titanic and SS Nomadic.

During the early years of the twentieth century, Cunard and White Star Line were arch shipping rivals and competed fiercely to dominate the booming North Atlantic shipping routes. In order to galvanise White Star Line’s position at the top of the industry William Pirrie, the Chairman of Harland and Wolff, proposed to build the largest and most modern passenger ships in the world.

Thus was born the concept of the Olympic class liners, to be called Olympic and Titanic. These would be 50% larger than any previous ship and would be the most opulent and luxurious vessels to cross the ocean; at the time they were the largest man-made objects in the world. This in turn required the largest slipways, overhead gantries and new dry docks to be constructed in the Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast. Science and technology were often playing catch-up and other ports and harbours around the world found it impossible to accommodate these huge new vessels.

This was particularly the case in the port of Cherbourg on the north coast of France. Whilst the main port of departure in Britain was Southampton, the transatlantic liners had to stop and collect passengers in Cherbourg, the fashionable port in mainland Europe, and Queenstown (now Cobh) in south-west Ireland.

At these interim ports the liners were too big to enter the harbours and instead they would anchor off shore and the passengers were ferried aboard on smaller ships known as tenders. At Queenstown the tenders used were operated by the local harbour company and were named Ireland and America. In Cherbourg the White Star Line decided to build and operate two brand-new tenders to serve their new Olympic-class flagships. The SS Traffic would transport steerage (third-class) passengers and the mail, and a second larger vessel, SS Nomadic, would cater for the wealthiest clientele.
Thus was born the White Star Line vessel, SS Nomadic. White Star Line’s view was that the unique travelling experience of the first- and second-class passengers across the Atlantic started as soon as they left dry land in Cherbourg and therefore SS Nomadic’s interiors reflected the distinctive grandeur of the new transatlantic liners Olympic and Titanic, giving them a taste of what was to come.

Therefore the same team that designed Titanic and Olympic developed the plans and specifications for Nomadic. Thomas Andrews the naval architect at Harland and Wolff oversaw the drawings for all three ships and Nomadic received the same meticulous preparation as Titanic.

RMS Olympic (Harland and Wolff ship number 400) was built on slipway no. 2 from 1908 to 1910, RMS Titanic (number 401) on slipway no. 3 from 1909 to 1911 and SS Nomadic (number 422) on slipway no. 1 from 1910 to 1911.

So all three ships were in neighbouring slipways and the same men worked on all three ships at the time. The steel for the hulls came from the same source, the rivets came from the same factory and all component parts for all the vessels were made by the same skilled craftsmen at Harland and Wolff’s many workshops. Thus SS Nomadic’s nickname was ‘Titanic’s little sister’.

SS Nomadic was launched from slipway no. 1 on 25 April 1911 and was fitted out in two months, most probably in Hamilton Dock where she is now permanently located as a ‘static attraction’. Hamilton Dock, built in 1867, has been restored to her former glory and is a testament to her designers and builders. SS Nomadic is approximately one quarter the length of RMS Titanic, 70m long and 11m wide, and 1273 tonnes.

SS Nomadic left Belfast for Cherbourg with her sister ship SS Traffic on 31 May 1911, the same day RMS Olympic sailed out of Belfast Lough for Southampton and also the day that Titanic was launched from slipway no. 3. SS Nomadic went on to tend RMS Olympic for many years. On 10 April 1912 Nomadic pulled alongside RMS Titanic with 142 first-class passengers and 30 second-class passengers on board.

SS Traffic was destroyed during the Second World War but Nomadic was to go on to a fascinating existence.

She was requisitioned by the French government in 1917 and converted into a minesweeper, then worked as a troop carrier. She continued to serve the great liners between the world wars and acted as an evacuation ship from Cherbourg in the Second World War. White Star Line was taken over by Cunard in 1934 and Olympic was then scrapped in 1937.

Cunard then decided that Nomadic was still ‘the most suitable ship to give service’ to the most famous of their liners the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth and over the subsequent decades many famous names boarded her, including Elizabeth, Richard Burton and Charlie Chaplin.

SS Nomadic was retired in 1968 and was then sold for salvage and her imminent scrapping seemed certain. But she was then bought by an enterprising French businessman who had visions of converting her into a floating restaurant and entertainment venue on the River Seine in Paris. Several ventures failed and Nomadic lay derelict for several years. Many of her historic artefacts and luxury fittings fell foul to looters and robbers.

Her life on the River Seine ended when safety regulations demanded her ageing hull be inspected. She was taken to a dry dock in Le Havre and her days seemed numbered. Due to actions by a small group of enthusiasts in Northern Ireland and Titanic Societies throughout the world, a vigorous campaign was launched for the return to her home in Belfast. At an auction in Paris, the Department of Social Development (‘DSD’) made a successful bid for Nomadic and in July 2006 she was formally welcomed back to her home city.

The DSD set up a voluntary body, the Nomadic Charitable Trust, to take ownership of the vessel, raise funds and oversee her restoration and conservation. The twelve trustees include historians, maritime experts and Titanic enthusiasts. One of the first actions taken was in 2008 when Nomadic was entered into the National Register of Historic Vessels under the core collection which formally recognises her historic significance.
The *Nomadic* Charitable Trust’s stated vision for the future of the vessel is ‘to restore and to make the *Nomadic* accessible to the public, to ensure that she can play a key role in the ongoing celebration of *Titanic*, ensure a lasting legacy to celebrate our maritime and industrial heritage and as a catalyst for tourism, social and economic development.’

On 31 May 2013, the 102nd anniversary of *Nomadic* leaving Belfast, the refurbished vessel was formally opened by the Tourism Minister. For the past year the *Nomadic* has proved to be the most popular visitor attraction in Northern Ireland. She is fully accessible to the public and much work has yet to be completed.

The Hamilton Dock where she is now berthed has also been refurbished as part of the overall restoration project. This is one of the many original Harland and Wolff dry docks that remain along the River Lagan in Belfast including the Thompson Dock, where *Titanic* was fitted out.

The *Nomadic* replicates the interior of *Titanic* and the other White Star Line vessels giving the sense of grandeur, class and style. The Charitable Trust have also set up a trading company which now operates the ship as a visitor attraction in a safe and commercial manner in line with the agreed business objectives. The trading company is a private not for profit entity with any profits being donated back to the *Nomadic* Charitable Trust to help fulfil their charitable objectives.

As part of the attraction there are interpretation tours for visitors and private functions can be accommodated. It is proving very popular with schools and community groups. See www.nomadicbelfast.com for more information.

**Bryan Patterson, Trustee Nomadic Charitable Trust, Belfast**

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**Editor’s Note**

I was really pleased to enjoy a visit to SS *Nomadic* in the summer of 2013. The ship was in excellent condition post-restoration and the guides were both friendly and knowledgeable. In the same dock is the original caisson for Hamilton Dock built in 1867 as ‘Hull No 50’ and believed to be the oldest Harland and Wolff vessel in the world. She was removed in 2009 and can be seen in one of the attached pictures. The *Nomadic* is close to the new *Titanic Belfast Experience* – www.titanicbelfast.com opened in March 2012 and cost in excess of £100m. A few hundred yards away in the Alexandra Dock is the light cruiser HMS *Caroline*, a veteran of the 1916 Battle of Jutland (above). Readers may be aware that the *Caroline* has received HLF funding of £12m to enable her restoration prior to the centenary of Jutland. The striking Harland and Wolff headquarters building (including drawing offices) was vacant and at the time of my visit (as it has been since 1989) but has subsequently received HLF funding of £5m to facilitate restoration as a hospitality centre. Walking tours of this very interesting area and access to the huge Thompson Dock and Pump House is available – see details at www.titanicsdock.com.

**Richard Holme**
Obituar 
ies for Dr Val (Velmo) J. L. Fontana
(16 April 1928–31 May 2014) and
Geoffrey George Harris (16 March 1930–4 March 2014),
founding NDS members and distinguished historians

It is always sad to lose dear friends, additionally so when they have made such a valuable contribution to scholarship. I met them through researching Portsmouth Dockyard at the (then) Royal Naval Museum and Public Record Office, before they both joined the fledgling Naval Dockyards Society in 1996.

Val Fontana’s parents came from northern Italy to Portsmouth via London and he attended St John’s College, Southsea from 1939–45. After National Service in the RAF as a radar operator, he took A Levels at the Municipal College (now University of Portsmouth) and gained a General Degree in Biological Sciences, followed by an Honours Degree in Comparative Anatomy and Physiology. In 1958 he was appointed to St John’s College to teach Sixth Form Biology.


In 1987 Val joined HMS *Warrior* 1860 as a volunteer guide when she arrived in Portsmouth, continuing until the week before he died. He edited *Warrior News* and was active in the Warrior Association. In 1995 he joined The Diggers in the Storehouse, researching in the Royal Naval Museum, attending monthly meetings until his death. He was also a stalwart member of the Catholic Records Society and from 2004 Assistant Archivist of the Diocesan Archive.

Geoffrey Harris was born in Woodford, educated at St Antony’s School Woodford 1935–41, St Ignatius College London 1941–8, Birkbeck College London 1950–3 and the Institute of Historical Research from 1953. He gained his BA in 1953 and MA in 1962, becoming FRHistS and FSA.

He served in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps 1948–50, was Junior Assistant Librarian King’s College London 1950–1 and became a civil servant at the Ministry of Defence 1951–90 (he attended a course at the NATO Defence College, Rome 1971–2 and was loaned to the Civil Service Department 1972–6), ending his career as Assistant Secretary. After retirement he continued his research. He lived in Hampstead for many years and returned to Woodford in 1998.

At Geoffrey’s memorial service (there was no funeral as he donated his body to research) the guests were coded as Bridge, Civil Service and Historians. It was great fun hearing stories from all these strands. His life was guided by the principles, ‘Never go to bed without a plan for what you will do the next’ and to enjoy eating and entertaining.

Both men, due to their commitment to meticulous research, made long-lasting contributions towards maritime history in its widest sense. For their joie-de-vivre and generosity they will remain in the fond memories of their families and friends.
Meet the Committee – Philip MacDougall

As a co-founder of the Naval Dockyards Society with Ann Coats, I have been a member since the very beginning. Back in the late 1990s I was editing the newsletter before taking a break and taking on a few other tasks. I’ve now returned to the committee as editor of Transactions, a somewhat tougher job than I envisaged. Still, in editing a first volume (No. 9 in the series) a few lessons have been learnt and hopefully in remembering these it will help me in both maintaining my sanity and getting the next volume out much quicker.

My interest in naval dockyards began when I lived on the Isle of Grain in North Kent, a fascinating area of the world that is sandwiched between the then closed royal dockyard at Sheerness and the functioning yard at Chatham. Grain, itself, if it had not been for its marshy nature, would also have been destined (c. 1801) to have its own naval dockyard, on a site later occupied by a major oil refinery.

From this early interest in the Royal Navy’s south coast yards, my research has taken me far and wide, becoming global in nature and resulting in a number of books. Among my earliest books were several on the Medway Towns and the dockyard at Chatham, of which this last was completely re-written and updated two years ago under the title, Chatham Dockyard: The Rise and Fall of a Military Industrial Complex. I have also given attention to the yards in London in my more recent publication, London and the Georgian Navy. My latest book, to be published in November, gives consideration to the important role played by the dockyards that supported the Maratha, Mysore and Mughal state navies while a further book will give similar attention to the Ottoman Empire.

These days I live in Chidham, a small village lying alongside Chichester Harbour. Here I’ve managed to find an important dockyard connection, for I have pinpointed the waterfront area as the site of Britain’s first royal dockyard, the one that built and supported the galleys that made up the extensive fleet possessed by Harold Godwinson, the last Saxon king. This means, of course, it even pre-dates the medieval yard at Portsmouth. However, while a few definite sites can be more or less confirmed, there is much required in the way of a more detailed archaeological investigation.

Philip MacDougall
HM Naval Dockyards, East Africa – Help needed!

I am looking to understand more about the war service of my father, J. V. G. Smith (born in October 1915). Although unfit for combat duties in the armed forces, he was accepted into the Naval Dockyards Department (I am not sure even if this is the right title?) of the Royal Navy. He had trained as an architect just prior to the Second World War. I know three things about his service. He worked in HM Kilindini Harbour Dockyards at Mombasa around 1943/44. He also saw service in 1943 in Madagascar and later in 1945 in the Seychelles. Relating to his stay at Kilindini, I have a copy of his Duty Pass for the Kilindini Harbour area dated 11 February 1943, and a permit to enter the Commercial Dock, Naval Dockyard dated 31 December 1944. I also have a certification that ‘although not required to wear uniform, Mr JVG Smith is an Admiralty Officer who is on official duty from the United Kingdom. He is entitled to the privileges normally accorded to such Officers.’ I have no idea what sort of work he would have been doing in Kilindini at this time and whether he was part of a large team of Brits or Commonwealth specialists, or working more on his own? I have a couple of photos that I think relate to his time on the Seychelles around early 1945 (he was back in the UK by August 1945). There is a family story that he was involved with laying a large water main across the island. His African workers were apparently enthusiastic in the use of dynamite and on one occasion blew up the existing water main, which left the island without water for a while! I also have various scenic photos with the stamp ‘Francois Vel, Seychelles’ on the back. (I assume Francois Vel was a local Seychelles photographer. There is a photo dated 1943, which shows part of a football team nicknamed by my father ‘Sunderland FC’ on Madagascar Island. The photo was taken prior to a ‘friendly’ match with Naval Base Team, which was apparently drawn 0–0. Eight of the nine people in the photo are named on the back by my father.

If anyone has knowledge of the activities of naval dockyard personnel such as my father in the latter years of the Second World War, I would be keen to hear, so that I can better understand what he did during that period of his life. Is there a history of the Naval Dockyards Group (or whatever it is called officially) and what it did during WWII?

Nick Smith – 4 August 2014
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Dockyards, November 2014

The Dockyards’ Waterloo? The Royal Dockyards and the Pressures of Global War, 1793–1815

Saturday 25 April 2015 11.00-16.50

National Maritime Museum Greenwich

Dr Roger Morriss: Innovation and Adaptation to Global War. Royal Dockyard Management and the Industrial Revolution 1793–1815

Catherine Beck: The Patronage of Dockyard Artificers, 1793–1815

Dr J. D. Davies: The Strange Life and Stranger Death of Milford Dockyard

Buffet Lunch

Major John R. Grodzinski, CD, PhD: The Royal Navy Dockyard at Point Frederick on Lake Ontario, 1814–1815

John Harris MA (Oxf) MA (GMI) FIH: The Naval Dockyard at English Harbour: Heroism or Logistics?

Dr John F. Day: Securing an Ocean for an Empire: British Naval Bases and the Eastern Seas (1784–1815)

Nives Lokošek: Did the Arsenal in Hvar experience its own Waterloo?

4.50 End