

PRESS RELEASE

MAJOR NEW INITIATIVE TO CONSERVE PORTSMOUTH DOCKYARD BUILDINGS AT RISK

The MoD is falling short of government legislation and guidance to maintain its historic dockyard buildings to a 'good' standard.

The Naval Dockyards Society calls upon the Ministry of Defence to begin a dialogue about conserving and re-using the most vulnerable buildings (§ have been on the At Risk Register since 2008):

- 2-8, The Parade (Grade II*): an elegant Georgian terrace of dockyard officers' houses built 1715–19, with attached kitchens and toilets and walled gardens. Offices from 1990–95, but since unused. They are suffering from wet rot and structural movement. Background heating has reduced damp, but a repairs schedule promised by May 2009 is still awaited. Condition: 'Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric; no solution agreed.' §
- Former Royal Naval Academy (Grade II*): built 1729–32, is one of the yard's oldest Georgian structures, a precursor of Britannia Royal Naval College. It was restored as a naval officers' mess after Second World War bomb damage, but since closure in 2007 water penetration has caused dry rot. Natural ventilation and background winter heating have reduced the damp, but water still enters the building. Condition: 'Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric; no solution agreed.' (On the At Risk Register since 2011)
- Iron and Brass Foundry (Grade II*): east wing (Gunnery Gear Store and Pattern Shop). By 1930, pattern-making had moved elsewhere in the Foundry. The east wing was unused, with water penetrating the west elevation. Condition: 'Slow decay; no solution agreed.' §
- No. 6 Dock (Scheduled Monument/Grade I) Built in 1700, it was cut off from the harbour when the western jetties were straightened in the 1990s for the aircraft carriers. Kept dry, the stonework has been weathered by sun and frost. The lower stones are disintegrating and mortar joints are opening up. Condition: 'Slow decay; no solution agreed.' §
- No. 25 Store (Grade II*), Yard Services Manager's Office. Built in 1786 in a group of four storehouses, it had a mould loft on the upper floor for drawing full-sized patterns for ships. It was in use until the 1980s. Condition: 'Slow decay; no solution agreed'; 'In fair condition but vacant. Future use uncertain.' §
- Portsmouth Pay Office (Grade II) Built in 1808, the earliest naval building to use cast iron for a fireproof structure. John Dickens, father of Charles, worked as a clerk in this new office until 1815. It was badly damaged in 1941 and rebuilt as a single storey office. Rain is penetrating the north elevation through the join between the original building and the 1941 repairs, damaging to the brickwork.
- Block Mills (Scheduled Monument/Grade I) Built in 1802, they were innovative in steam-powered mass-production pulley-blocks, in use until 1983. Despite restoration in 2008, they have had no subsequent re-use because they are close to the western jetties, and removal of the external iron staircases limits safe access to the upper floors. With little regular ventilation, fumes rising from the underground reservoir are trapped in the building.
- Remaining railway track needs surveying. From an internal horse-drawn tramway c.1825, the dockyard railway was connected to the main line in 1856. It was crucial in building the Great Extension (1865–1881). At its peak there were 25 miles of track. The line closed in 1978. Remnants of track remain, as well as the Royal Naval Railway Shelter and Waiting Room.

The longer these structures are left unrepaired, the more they will cost to conserve. The best way to secure their durable conservation is appropriate re-use. With the disposal of HMS Nelson wardroom announced in 2016, the former Royal Naval Academy and The Parade are logical replacements, their renovation satisfying naval ethos, conservation and operational requirements. An immediate and a long-term broad-based plan of action could be managed through a MoD Conservation Group or a Heritage Partnership Agreement in collaboration with appropriate heritage stakeholders.

Further information about Portsmouth Dockyard historic buildings can be found in Coats, A., Davies, J. D., Evans, D., and Riley, R. (2015). *20th Century Naval Dockyards: Devonport and Portsmouth Characterisation Report*. Portsmouth: Naval Dockyards Society <https://navaldockyards.org/c20-naval-dockyards/>

Further details about this initiative can be obtained from Dr Ann Coats, avcoatsndschair@gmail.com and the Naval Dockyards Society website, <https://navaldockyards.org/news/>

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. No embargo: for immediate release
2. The Naval Dockyards Society is a UK-based international organisation which aims to explore the civil branches of navies and their material culture. Further details can be found at its website, <https://navaldockyards.org/>