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Welcome to another issue of Dockyards!

I was glad to visit the newly restored Painted Hall at Greenwich in August and enjoy an excellent guided tour. The Hall has been the subject of a two year £8.5m restoration programme. An image of the marvellous interior is shown right. Readers will remember the Hall was painted by Sir James Thornhill between 1707 and 1726.

In August two naval fixtures in Portsmouth harbour departed for break up at Aliaga in Turkey. These were the small fleet tankers RFA Black Rover (pictured below left) and RFA Gold Rover, sold in total for over £1.5m. They had been decommissioned as long ago as 2016 and 2017 respectively. The last nineteen RN ships have been demolished at Aliaga although unusually the Rovers did not go to the Loyal shipbreaker there.

In June I enjoyed an excellent eleven-hour boat trip round Rotterdam docks with the Thames Ship Society and stayed at the Delta Hotel in Vlaardingen; many rooms there have a grandstand view of shipping movements. Pictured bottom left is the liner MS Rotterdam pictured from my bedroom window! Contact coxen@tankeroperator.com for details of the 2020 trip.

I was glad recently to see a rare showing of the classic 1927 silent film The Battles of Coronel and Falkland Islands, depicting the renowned 1914 naval battles. The film includes dockyard scenes as Jacky Fisher and Winston Churchill put pressure on Devonport to get the battlecruisers HMS Invincible and HMS Inflexible ready a couple of days earlier than had been suggested. Expense was spared by filming the battle scenes off the Scilly Islands rather than going to the South Atlantic . . . watch this film if you get a chance! Below right is an image of Whalebone Cove where HMS Canopus fired the first shots of the Battle of the Falklands. The Cove is now occupied by the hulk of the Lady Elizabeth, built at Sunderland in 1879.
With the carrier programme winding down, good news for Rosyth Dockyard was the awarding in September of the contract for the five new Type 31e frigates to Babcock International, who will assemble the ships there. It is believed this will secure 450 jobs in the dockyard.

Let me know if you have any items for future issues, however big or small. Many thanks as ever to production editor Nicholas Blake. All pictures are by authors of articles unless otherwise stated.

Richard Holme (richardholme@btinternet.com) – Editor

Twitter and the NDS

In a previous issue of Dockyards, I introduced myself as the NDS Honorary Treasurer. Recently, I have also taken on the position of Twitter manager for the NDS. Some months ago our previous Twitter manager quit and unfortunately we have no way of getting into and updating our previous Twitter account. That account had 1,855 followers. As I write this, our new account has just 246 followers so we have lost a large number of followers. So, my first request is to those of you who have followed @navdocksoc in the past. Please be aware that that account is now no longer in operation. If you would like to follow us on Twitter can I please ask that you follow @dockyardsociety instead?

For those of you who do not use Twitter my second request is that you consider joining. It is very easy to set up an account. First you would need to install the free Twitter app on your computer, tablet or smart phone. Then you need to choose a username and password. Finally, you need to follow @dockyardsociety.

My third request is that you encourage others in the field to follow us too so that we can build a community of those interested in dockyards and naval history.

My final request is that if you come across an item which you think may be of interest to the NDS community that you alert me so that I can tweet it out. You could do that either by emailing me at ndstreasurer@hotmail.co.uk or by tweeting a direct message to @dockyardsociety.

Let me know of course if you have any queries on the above.

David Jenkins

Meet the committee

Gillian Hughes, Liaison Officer, Navy Board Project

When my three children were at school, I started to research the naval careers of my grandfather and great-grandfather, who both served in the Royal Navy. Both men had written naval reminiscences and I took myself to the Public Record Office in about 1970 when Admiralty and Navy Board records were kept at Chancery Lane, a severe Victorian building where the staff almost seemed reluctant to allow ‘their’ records to be perused. However, in 1975 an extension was built at Kew to house ‘modern’ records with a slightly more friendly air to it. Nearly all the records were on paper or vellum and it is difficult now to realize when so much has been digitized that one was actually able to handle the original documents. How different it is today at the National Archives at Kew. Besides my direct forebears I located several more who had served in the Navy and HM Coastguard, but also a Chief Constructor and shipwrights in Ports-
mouth Dockyard. One day I was asked if I could help another reader on a paid basis and thus became a freelance, independent researcher. This led me to visit other record offices, even in France and the USA, and I joined several related societies including the Society for Nautical Research, the Navy Records Society and the Naval Dockyards Society and attended several conferences both in this country and abroad. I also served on the Advisory Council on Public Records. The commissions I received varied from a man’s naval career, medal entitlements to the introduction of limes to a sailor’s diet, shipwrecks, prize money and the history of weather in 1700. This was an interesting one from an Italian client who had found that the only source for weather at this period in the known world was contained in the Royal Navy’s captains’ and ships’ logs. Another unusual commission was to prove, again through captains’ logs, that a North American tribe had fishing rights on the northwest coast of Vancouver, now Canada. The tribe had a certain style of painting their bodies which was recorded in the log which they have to this day. I virtually retired in 2000 and it seemed inevitable that I should join Sue Lumas as her first recruit to the Navy Board Project. I am very proud that I was able to see it to its conclusion earlier this year and am looking forward to speaking at the NDS ADM 106 event at Kew on 20 November.

Gillian Hughes

The NDS ad hoc Archives Collection

The collection has grown gradually as members and contacts have passed on their personal collections. It began when the then Secretary (now Chair) was contacted in January 2013 by R. W. Plumtree, a former member of the Royal Naval Supply and Transport Service (1968–2001), known as the ‘history man’ because of his interest in historical naval matters. He had collected a variety of documents and some pieces were his own unclassified work underpinning Defence Cost Study No. 10 in the early 1990s.

The February 2013 Committee Meeting agreed that the NDS would accept material relevant to the NDS that would not have an obvious home elsewhere. In the long term the Society will contact an existing repository about storing material such as this. Mr Plumtree signed an Archive Deposit Agreement (based on TNA guidance documents) to warrant that he was not infringing any security or copyright regulations. An article was published in Dockyards (18(1), June 2013, p. 13) to this effect.

Physical/hard copy deposits to date, access for NDS members by arrangement with Dr Ann Coats avcoatsndschair@gmail.com:

1 Royal Naval Supply and Transport Service Collection Part 1 consignment deposited 24 March 2013 by R. W. Plumtree, see above. This was reported in Dockyards 18(1). Part 2 was deposited 14 June 2013. A list of their contents is available on the website.

2 Bernard Mennell (also a former member of the Royal Naval Supply & Transport Service) has kindly donated the following items (2) to (5). Victualling Department: The end of an era, The Naval Review (July 1994, pp. 238–9).


6 Michael Bussell (structural engineer) Sheerness, Deptford and Chatham structures (photos).

During 2019 a Facebook group was set up concerning records and images of Bermuda Dockyard: The Bermuda Dockyard community during the Second World war and the postwar years, https://www.facebook.com/groups/408892213001927/. This is a closed group which NDS members can join. The NDS is investigating GDPR regulations to enable uploading some of their documents and images to our website.

Dr Ann Coats
Pembroke Dock – a pilot’s remarkable war story

The naval dockyard at Pembroke Dock closed in 1926 and the area became the largest flying-boat station in the world during the 1939–45 war. With the recent death in Australia, at the age of 101, of Coastal Command pilot Dudley Marrows a remarkable wartime story has been recalled.

Dudley Marrows was captain of a Sunderland flying boat of No. 461 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force, based at RAF Station Pembroke Dock in west Wales. In 1943, during the height of the Battle of the Atlantic Campaign, Sunderlands and other maritime aircraft made long and dangerous flights to seek out the German submarines (U-boats) which were attacking the convoy lifelines bringing supplies, munitions and food across the Atlantic.

On 30 July 1943, Marrows and his crew were involved in what has been described as ‘one of the greatest single victories of the war against the U-boats operating in the Bay of Biscay’. Three U-boats were sighted and they remained close together on the surface to fight back. Several Coastal Command aircraft arrived and some time later Marrows seized his chance, diving into attack through heavy fire to perfectly drop depth changes around a submarine. The resulting explosions broke the craft in half.

Marrrows was flying Sunderland ‘U’ of 461 Squadron and in a remarkable coincidence he and his crew had sunk U-461 – a large supplies-carrying submarine. As survivors struggled in the water the Sunderland crew dropped one of their own dinghies. U-461’s captain, Wolf Steibler, and fourteen others were later rescued by the Royal Navy and many years later Marrows and Steibler met up and visited each other in Australia and Germany.

Another of the U-boats was sunk by an RAF aircraft and the third submerged but was hunted down and sunk by Royal Navy vessels.

Six weeks later, during another Bay of Biscay patrol, Marrows’ Sunderland was attacked by six Luftwaffe Junkers Ju88s off the Spanish coast. After a battle lasting nearly an hour the Sunderland was ditched and the eleven crew, some of them wounded, had to cram into a six-man dinghy from which they were later rescued.

For these two actions Marrows was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and later the Distinguished Service Order. After the war he became a very successful citrus fruit farmer in Victoria. The picture above shows Marrows and his crew by the dinghy mentioned above and which saved their lives.

John Evans – Pembroke Dock Heritage Centre

Dockyard paintings at Woburn Abbey

Woburn Abbey is perhaps best known for its Georgian architecture and safari park but I noticed two superb paintings of dockyards on a recent most enjoyable visit. Woburn is still home to the Duke of Bedford.

The first is our cover picture, which depicts a Canaletto of the Arsenale, one of twenty-four commissioned by Lord John Russell following his visit to Venice in 1731, while on the Grand Tour. He became 4th Duke of Bedford in 1732. Twenty-one of the twenty-four paintings are displayed together in the Dining Room, a spectacular sight. The other three are elsewhere in the house. The twenty-four cost just £188. It is thought Canaletto used artistic licence to widen the gap between the two Arsenale towers in his painting. Readers’ views on this are welcome.
The second is a painting dated 1855 by a German artist Schranz of the Black Sea Fleet at Malta in 1853. It was then under the command of Admiral Lord Edward Russell (1805–1887), son of John Russell, 6th Duke of Bedford. Ships shown are Vengeance, Albion, Britannia, Arethusa, Rodney, Retribution, Trafalgar and Bellerophon. The Schranz family of painters had settled in Malta in 1818.

Dr Conrad Thake of the University of Malta has kindly commented on where the view in the painting is from.

‘The viewpoint of the painting, i.e. the foreground where the fisherman are, would be the place where there is the Number One Dock at the inlet of what is today known as Dockyard Creek and in the times of the knights Porto delle Galere. Or it could be slightly further up from the Dock on the Birgu side near the inlet of the creek. The local fishermen in Cospicua had petitioned the British governor against having the dock there as it would have deprived them of the only access to the sea i.e. for the Bormlizi – residents of Cospicua, one of the Three Cities. Obviously, the petition fell on deaf ears as they never stood a chance with the British Admiralty. I am attaching a plan of the Grand Harbour where I think the viewpoint was taken. Marked spot on this is where Number One dock was built, if the painting dates to 1853 the dock would already have been there so one would have to shift sideways on the Birgu side past the Dock. On one side of the painting there is certainly Senglea crowned with the church of St Philip Neri, the other I am not 100% sure if it is Valletta or the Birgu (Vittoriosa) peninsula with Fort St Angelo at the tip facing Senglea.’

Woburn Abbey is currently closed for an exciting refurbishment programme but is expected to re-open in early 2021. See www.woburnabbey.co.uk

Richard Holme
The Estonian Maritime Museum, Tallinn

Tourists flock to the old walled medieval town of Tallinn, Estonia, which is rightly a great attraction. Rather fewer visit the town’s maritime museum, though it is Estonia’s most popular museum. It was founded on the initiative of former captains and sailors in 1935 and in 1965 moved to Fat Margaret, a defensive medieval tower in the old town. The tower and exhibition here have been closed for renovations but are due to re-open later this year. In May 2012, the Maritime Museum (meremuuseum.ee.en) opened another large exhibition space at the Lennusdam Seaplane Harbour with its historic seaplane hangar which was built in 1916–17 as part of the defences of St Petersburg, and was used for seaplanes until the Second World War. The architecture of the hangar is remarkable, featuring the world’s first columnless thin-shell concrete domes of such volume. It was renovated between 2009 and 2012 for use as a museum ship hall housing the submarine Lembít, a replica Short 184 seaplane (the type used by the Estonian Air Force during the interwar period), the remains of the sixteenth-century Maasilinna ship, a number of small craft, guns and various smaller items from the museum’s collections. Afloat in the Seaplane Harbour are the steam-powered icebreaker Suur Tõll, which dates from 1914 (and has flown the flags of Imperial Russia, Finland, the Soviet Union and the Republic of Estonia), a patrol boat and a naval auxiliary; three patrol boats and a minesweeper are displayed ashore on the quayside. Visitors can go aboard a number of the ships including the icebreaker and submarine.

When we visited Tallinn in May 2019 the Fat Margaret site was still closed, but we were able to walk around the foreshore from the cruise dock to the Seaplane Harbour, passing a strange Soviet-era building which resembled concrete military bunkers, covered in graffiti, but turned out to be a concert hall, now disused. The 1980 Moscow Olympics brought a lot of weird buildings to Tallinn as the sailing regatta was held there. The city needed to prove itself as the socialist heaven it had claimed to be for decades, and thus underwent a massive reconstruction before the Olympics. The Linnahall concert hall was one of the strangest buildings added to the shoreline next to the harbour; the original name was the Vladimir Ilyich Lenin Culture and Sports Palace. After reaching the maritime museum site and viewing the exhibits in the harbour we entered the Seaplane Hangar ship hall which also has a café. As well as the permanent exhibits this housed a temporary exhibition entitled Sex and the Sea, perhaps a desperate attempt by the museum’s marketing staff to attract more visitors. It featured old ships’ figureheads of women in immodest dress, and a recreation of a room in the port’s red-light district.

The submarine Lembít was launched by Vickers Armstrong, Barrow, in 1936, and delivered to Estonia in July of the following year, to become the pride of the Estonian Navy. Lembít and her sister ship Kalev have been the only submarines in Estonian naval history thus far. After the Soviet Union occupied Estonia in 1940 Lembít served in the Red Banner Baltic Fleet of the Soviet Navy and

The seaplane hangar features the world’s first large columnless thin-shell concrete domes, the shells of which are only 8mm thick at the top.
torpedoed one ship, whilst mines she laid sank one ship and damaged another. After the Second World War she was used for training during her long exile in Russia. Kalev, however, was lost during the war. In 1979 Lembit returned to Tallinn and became a museum ship afloat, opening to the public in 1985. She was hauled ashore in 2011 to be exhibited in the seaplane hangar.

Dr Paul Brown

Isla del Rey, Menorca – restoration of the Naval Hospital

The Foundation Hospital Isla del Rey continues to progress apace with its restoration of the first-ever purpose-built and British-owned naval hospital, opened in 1711. There have been some exciting and dynamic changes recently.

The work of international volunteers and donations from a wide variety of sources have made possible an extraordinary and hitherto almost unimaginable restoration project. We are now in the final stages of not only restoring the building’s magnificent former architectural lines with its typical U shape (and flying buttresses now standing firm once again), but also preparing it to take on a new life for the benefit of present and future generations. Lying in the centre of one of the largest natural harbours in the world and with over three hundred years of history, this extraordinary project is now coming to fruition.

On the ground floor of the old hospital, we now have a library with over four thousand books (including treasures from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), several rooms displaying historical medical equipment and instruments, two rooms dedicated to the pharmacists of the past, a Catholic church and sacristy, an Anglican chapel and church hall and various other interesting exhibitions.

One welcome recent development was the receipt of a government grant from the Spanish cultural department for the restoration of the final part of the old hospital; this is the south wing, which has been waiting for funding to complete necessary structural repairs.

An Interpretation Centre on the history of the harbour of Mahon on the first floor is being created. We have received funding already for a French Room to tell the story of the five times that the French were present on Menorca. We have also recently received funding for the British Room, which will follow similar lines in explaining the British occupation of Menorca, covering a considerable part of the eighteenth century. There are also replicas (made by the inmates of the local Penitentiary Centre) of ancient mosaics from the sixth-century basilica which was on the site. Another room is under construction to show how the local boat-making industry played an important part in nautical activities. We hope to have all the rooms completed and open for summer 2020, but progress depends on the financial backing we receive.
Perhaps one of the most spectacular developments and one which has given us a nail-biting three years to get the required approvals, is to welcome the prestigious art gallery of Hauser & Wirth (www.hauserwirth.com). They are taking charge of the restoration of a separate part of the hospital, known as the Langara building. This was built by the Spanish Admiral Langara in the late eighteenth century to accommodate his troops during a winter stay in the harbour of Mahón. It was the last part of the buildings on the island to be used before it was closed down in 1964. The Hauser & Wirth project will include one of their exceptional galleries of contemporary art, as well as gardens, offices and a canteen with terraces. Having seen the old farmhouse converted by Hauser & Wirth in Bruton, Somerset, and the way they work in harmony with both the local environment and with schools, we are totally satisfied that this will not only be complementary to Isla del Rey but also beneficial for all of Menorca.

By spring 2020, our plan is to have both the art gallery and the Interpretation Centre open to the public. However, there remains much to do still and we anticipate a minimum of two to five years more of work to have the building fully restored.

The images below show the naval hospital before restoration began in 2005 and more recently in 2019. See also our website www.islahospitalmenorca.org

Beverley Ward
The Great Quadrangle Store House at Sheerness

The building of the Great Quadrangle Store House in Sheerness Dockyard was commenced in 1824 to the designs of architect Edward Holl, Surveyor of Buildings to the Admiralty. It was completed in 1829. The massive five-storey building occupied a 3.1 acre site and provided around 60,000 square feet of storage space. The voluminous storage area provided was intended to be able to fully accommodate the whole of the vast array of stores and equipment required for the running of a Royal Naval dockyard. Due to the marshy nature of the ground on which the storehouse was built some 6,000 piles were used to support its foundations. The walls of the storehouse were all built of brick. The large rusticated granite archway of the main entrance, containing iron gates and sturdy doors, was set centrally on its western side facing the small basin, and was said to resemble the entrance of the old Newgate Prison. Internally the floor of each of the upper storeys was supported by means of a cast-iron framework comprising vertical pillars carrying a horizontal matrix of beams on which was laid the floor of rectangular York stone slabs, each 4 feet by 2 feet and 3½ inches thick. All materials used for construction of the store house were selected with an aim that the completed building should be fireproof.

A prominent exterior feature of the Store House was the large weather-boarded clock tower, 12½ feet square at its base and some 34 feet high, and surmounted by a large weather vane, which stood on the roof of the building above its main entrance. The four clock faces, each 5 feet in diameter, allowed the time to be read from virtually any location within the dockyard or harbour. The clock would subsequently serve for more than half a century before the time eventually arrived when it became beyond economic repair. This resulted in October 1881 in a replacement clock being installed within the tower. Manufactured by J. W. Benson of London, the new clock was set on a cast-iron frame. Like its predecessor it contained four dials, each of five feet diameter, and struck the quarters and hours on three bells which had been part of the original clock. The pendulum was designed to compensate for temperature changes, being designed with zinc and iron tubes to counter the effects of expansion and contraction in hot and cold weather. The weights, about 6 cwt each, were suspended by wires wound around wrought-iron drums and able to descend the whole length of the tower.

During the First World War the supposed fireproof nature of the Quadrangle Store House would be subjected to a severe test. On the evening of Tuesday, 5 June 1917 twenty-one German Gotha bombers flew in southwards over the sea to launch an aerial attack on Sheerness, dropping thirty-two 12.5kg and 50kg bombs on the dockyard and town. The dockyard received five 50kg bombs; one of them, falling on equipment, caught fire, burning savagely for three hours before the blaze was brought under control. The store house would acquit itself well in its ordeal by fire for, although...
hundreds of pounds’ worth of stores were lost, as it was packed with lifebelts, fenders and other flammable items, the building itself would emerge almost totally unscathed.

The Quadrangle Store, which had recently undergone a major refurbishment of its roof and windows, passed into new hands in 1960, when the Royal Naval Dockyard became placed in private ownership to be operated as a commercial port. Under the new management the store was to be known by a new name: Shed 19. Under this less than glamorous title it was initially put to use for housing and processing the cargo traffic of the John Cockerill Line generated on its Rouen and Ostend services, and for goods transported by MacAndrews and Co., Ltd., on their Spanish run. In September 1965, however, it was announced that the building was to be found a new use with part of it being reutilized as a secure high duty goods transit shed. Before taking on its new role sophisticated security devices to the standards demanded by the Customs and Excise for bonded warehouses were installed. It would turn out that the overwhelming use to which facility would be put was for housing bulk imports, contained in large barrels, of continental wines and spirits. Within a few years, however, the method of transportation for such goods began switching to road tankers leaving the bonded warehouse increasingly underutilized. The last delivery of barrelled wine passed through the warehouse in July 1977, after which it was closed.

By this time the port management had already been contemplating plans to demolish the Quadrangle Store House. As early as June 1971 they made an application to the local planning authority for permission to pull down the building. It would not be until April 1977 however that the local council’s development sub-committee gave approval to the owners of the port, Medway Ports Authority, for the demolition of what was referred to in the application as Shed 19. By then, however, the Quadrangle Store House had gained a Grade Two protected building status, so that final permission for its demolition lay with the Department of the Environment, which, much to the chagrin of the harbour company, determined that a public enquiry should be held.
The enquiry, which lasted for six days while all the submissions were heard, was held before an Inspector from the DoE at the beginning of August 1977. The single supporter of the harbour company’s demolition proposal would be the ever-cooperative local Swale Council. Among those present to oppose it were representatives from each of an impressive array of conservation organizations which included The Georgian Group, Ancient Monuments Society, Kent Historic Buildings Committee, The Civic Trust, The Council for British Archaeology, Association of Industrial Archaeology, National Survey of Industrial Archaeology, The Victorian Society and The Faversham Society.

The case presented by the ports authority to justify the demolition of the Store House was that in the operation of the port, there was no practical purpose to which the now empty building could be put. The port was undergoing major redevelopment to become a container terminal. For the 60,000 containers a year that the port would be handling a minimum of six acres of storage space would be needed. If the redundant storehouse was demolished the 3.1 acres it occupied would go some way towards meeting this necessary requirement. It was threatened that if the port did not modernize by switching its activities to containerization, its future was in jeopardy, with disastrous consequences in terms of redundancies for the workforce and major loss of economic input into the local economy.

In delivering their objections to the demolition of the Quadrangle Store House the representatives of the conservation groups referred in detail to its national architectural and historical importance, and its need to be preserved as an outstanding example of late Georgian industrial building. They claimed that, by a negligence of forethought in planning the siting of its new berth container berth, the harbour company itself was responsible for generating the situation where it was now demanding that the Store should be removed. They doubted that the company had acted with full vigor in exploring alternative uses to which the Store House could be put.
Following the closure of the enquiry the anxious conservationists would be forced to wait until the end of February 1978 before the DoE Inspector finally published his report. It would leave them bitterly disappointed, for in it he stated that ‘Whilst the loss of such a fine and interesting building as the Quadrangle storehouse must be greatly regretted my conclusion must be that the economic forces in favour of its demolition are too strong to be denied.’ He thought the Medway Ports Authority had presented a ‘convincing case’ for establishing a container terminal at Sheerness. ‘Allied with the Authorities interests’ he wrote ‘is the economic well being of the Isle of Sheppey, which is so dependent on the continued prosperity of the port of Sheerness.’ Thus was the Great Quadrangle Store doomed to be demolished.

The report would however contain some minor nods to the conservation concerns. It stated the clock tower must be dismantled and re-erected at a suitable site in the port. Also the cast-iron columns and beams, and Yorkshire floor slabs should be salvaged for use elsewhere, or for display in a museum.

The demolition of the Great Quadrangle Store was put in hand during the summer of 1979. The Quadrangle Store contained some 300,000 tons of cast iron and 1,400 cubic metres of brick and York stone to be disposed of. In accordance with the conditions laid down in the grant of demolition, the York stone flooring slabs were saved and advertised for sale both individually and at the price of £32 per ton. Examples of some of the cast-iron work were put aside for preservation in the Science and Iron Bridge Museums. The clock was put in the hands of Gillett & Johnson of Croydon for renovation, and the clock tower re-sited on the lawn at the front of Dockyard Terrace at the east end of the former dockyard.

David T. Hughes

SOME SUBMISSIONS MADE AT THE ENQUIRY INTO THE PROPOSED DEMOLITION OF THE GREAT QUADRANGLE STORE HOUSE

The Kent Historic Buildings Committee
The Quadrangle Storehouse is an important member of the Sheerness Dockyard Group of buildings, a handsomely utilitarian precinct which merits every effort to preserve it. It is, moreover, a fine building in its own right. Being designed by Holl, it is undoubtedly a much solider and more durable structure than any contemporary replacement could possibly be and from all reports it is still in good heart after giving a century and a half of yeoman service. We find it difficult to believe that an expanding port such as Sheerness can find no use for this magnificently robust old building and until we see some convincing proof that adaptation to modern needs is impossible, we shall strongly oppose demolition.

The Civic Trust
The Great Quadrangle is a superb building of great importance in its context near the Boat Store and other features of architectural or engineering significance and in assessing this application it seems essential for inquiries to be made about the extent to which the applicants have thought out comprehensive and long-term plans for the development of the docks.

The Council for British Archaeology.
The Quadrangle Store House was reputedly the largest building of its kind in the world when it was completed in 1829 as such epitomised the dramatic scale of the Sheerness Dockyard project. It occupies a vital situation in respect of the historic buildings within the dockyard and its demolition would be a tragedy.

The Georgian Group
The Group has shown particular interest in the Quadrangle Store since 1959 – shortly before the dockyard closed. An article in The Times in February of that year stressed that this building in particular must be preserved. Before vacating the dockyard in 1960, the Admiralty carried out substantial repairs to the windows and roof which accounts now for its quite remarkable preservation.
The Group has since 1959 kept a watchful eye on all the buildings within the yard, but in spite of sustained opposition, failed to prevent the demolition of HMS Wildfire or the officers’ offices, both buildings of historical significance. The group does not want the same fate to befall the Quadrangle Store. Since it was built in 1829 it has been used for a variety of purposes, the most recent as a bonded store. But the last delivery of casked wine to Sheerness was made in the Palacio on 19 July. Now the MPA have no use for it.

Alternative uses have been considered by the MPA and the local authority. These include unit load storage, car parking, hotel, housing, offices and museum. Adequate consideration has not been given in our view to part conversion and part demolition.

We suggest that if employment was the overriding issue, conversion of the building to light industry such as ship repair or a new type of employment could be the answer. The employment issue was only looked at on a borough-wide basis. The county considers Sheppey to be of only tertiary importance in its need for jobs. Indeed, the new forest terminal will lead to the loss of some jobs in the Medway towns, and this is of first importance as shown in the Kent Structure Plan.

We doubt if sufficient thought has been given to the possibility of interchanging the uses of three berths now in operation. It seems remarkable now, that the MPA spent millions of pounds on a jetty which was to serve a non-containerized trade. It was built with so little provision for adaptation to containers and with such little regard for its long-term earning capacity that it has effectively sterilized the parts of the site most suitable from the planning point of view for the container berth.

Instead of tackling the problem they themselves have created in developing Berths 2 and 3 the authority turned to Berth 1, which is limited by the Boat Store and Quadrangle Storehouse. Demolition is now being considered because the authority is disinclined to take on the responsibility of solving the problem.

We were opposed to the infilling of the Small Basin, which has already been carried out, and suggest that with more thought and better planning, the storage area could be found leaving the store – or better part of it – intact. The authority should have had the foresight to envisage the growth of container trade.

The Georgian Group feel that a planned policy for listed buildings would have allowed more freedom of planning than now exists. Inevitably there must be a conflict of interest between the present site encumbered with buildings and structures of historic interest and an ideal site. In the resolution of this conflict so far as we see the listed buildings (and the nation’s heritage) as the losers.

**Tropical Travels in the Lesser Antilles**

*Our Tour of English Harbour, Antigua: May 2019*

Vivid colours, rich material culture and enthusiasm characterized this study tour of a unique and well-preserved remnant of a British tropical eighteenth-century naval dockyard at English Harbour, featuring natural hurricane protection and a defensible harbour mouth. Also called Nelson’s Dockyard because of his 1784–7 posting, it was inscribed as a UNESCO world heritage site in 2016.∗

Our delegates utilized a BA group package with St James’s Club, Mamora Bay, St Paul’s, thirty minutes’ drive from the dockyard. The accommodation was superb, large rooms, beautiful views, first-class cleanliness and service, varied restaurants and ample food. Member John Harris is thanked particularly for his impeccable arrangements. He had visited previously and gave a paper, ‘The Naval Dockyard at English Harbour: Heroism or Logistics?’, at the 2015 conference: *The Royal Dockyards and the Pressures of Global War, 1793–1815*.

* UNESCO Antigua Naval Dockyard and Related Archaeological Sites, https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1499. Inscription places a responsibility on the owning country to protect and preserve the site but awards no money. It ‘brings an increase in public awareness of the site and of its outstanding values, thus also increasing the tourist activities at the site. When these are well planned for and organized respecting sustainable tourism principles, they can bring important funds to the site and to the local economy.’ [http://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/](http://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/). However, excessive numbers of visitors can swamp sites and cause environmental damage.
Right: The Naval Officer’s and Clerk’s House (1855), now the Dockyard Museum.

Below: The Pitch and Tar Store, now the Admiral’s Inn.


Right: Officers’ Quarters (1821), now hosting small businesses, above twelve water cisterns holding 1,000 tons in total. (I. Stafford)
The Society's host was Dr Reg Murphy, Director Heritage Resources Antigua & Barbuda National Parks and Secretary-General of Antigua’s National Commission for UNESCO. He is also a co-founder and President of the Museum of Antigua, a trustee of the Clarence House Restoration Trust, Antigua, Chairman of the Betty’s Hope Estate Project and a director of the Barbuda Research and Archaeological Center. He was awarded an MBE in 2018, ‘For contribution to preservation and promotion of Antigua and Barbuda's history and heritage.’

We began on Saturday 18 May with a walking tour of English Harbour Dockyard and Fort Berkeley, led by John Harris. The Naval Officer’s House was experienced by Patrick Leigh Fermor as ‘sad and echoing chambers . . . decayed almost to the verge of disintegration’ in 1947. Renovated in the 1960s, it is now the Dockyard Museum beside a group of traveller's trees. This Madagascan native, *Ravenala madagascariensis*, signifies the transportation of species such as sugar cane and breadfruit around British colonies.*

Restoration began with the Society of Friends of English Harbour, set up in 1951, which obtained a thirty-six-year-lease and performed urgent repairs worth £9,000, raised from donations and visitor fees (40k a year). In 1955 a further £40,000 was raised by a Special Appeal Committee to completely restore all the buildings to their original state apart from the Clothing and Canvas Store. This committee disbanded in 1967, having regenerated a viable tourist destination, enhanced by yachting enterprises.

The government passed the National Parks Act in 1984, designating the dockyard a National Park Authority, ‘entrusted with protection of the cultural and natural heritage of the area.’ Desmond Nicholson, who arrived in 1949, depicted the dockyard in decay and continued its renovation from the 1980s, establishing the Museum of Antigua and Barbuda in St John’s and the Dockyard Museum in English Harbour. He was President of the Antigua Archaeological Society in 1971, President of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology 1979–83 and Director of the Dockyard Museum in 1996.† We had plenty of time to look at the refurbished buildings and enjoyed refreshments from the restored Lumber Store, now a hotel. The buildings are mostly occupied by commercial companies, often continuing former activities, thus the Master Shipwright's kitchen is a bakery and the Seaman’s Galley (1778, dismantled 1820s, rebuilt 1858) is a bar. The Officers’ Quarters are beautifully refurbished as small business units, still with water cisterns below.

On Sunday 19 May the party was given a great welcome to the joyful service at Falmouth Anglican Church, accompanied by spirited singing and a vigorous steel band. Two non-communicants planned to inspect Falmouth Harbour, but all the premises were closed and docks inaccessible, then torrential rain made late entry to the church advisable. It was moving to see how enthusiastically the congregation belong to this place.

On Monday 20 May we attended a presentation in the Dockyard Officers’ Quarters by Dr Chris Waters, Assistant Manager, Heritage Department, and Desley Gardner MA, Heritage Resource Officer, on how the museum achieved UNESCO world heritage status and its current targets. We learned that the National Park (162 miles) comprises the Dockyard, Shirley Heights and the Middle Ground (high ground above English Harbour towards Falmouth Harbour, which protected the dockyard and where enslaved workers, soldiers and their families lived from the 1790s to 1854). It is now deforested and overgrazed by goats, which erode the soil, but belong to the park. The park can oppose development plans which contravene its foundation criteria. A buffer zone of 152 km includes fortifications, Falmouth Harbour and military graveyards. The park has 160k visitors a year, 125k of whom are from cruise ships. Residents attend events such as Reggae in the Park, fishing tournaments and school visits. Local craftsmen provide all refurbishment skills as their ancestors did historically, in wood, stone and lime mortar (eight apprentice stonemasons were trained on the Clarence House project).

The National Park must be self-sustaining and non-profit. Income includes marina mooring and commercial leases. Volunteers include the 1,000-member Tot Club, founded in 1991, which meets daily at the dockyard at 6pm, Girl Guides and Youth Antigua. Chris concluded by stating that they have plenty of capacity – what they lack is money.

We then took a delightful boat trip, steered by Mannix, through the harbour mouth, giving good sea views of Fort Berkeley, the dramatically eroded limestone Pillars of Hercules, a turtle and pelicans off Freeman’s Bay, ending in Tank Bay west of the dockyard. Afterwards some of us crossed Tank Bay to enjoy a wonderful lunch in the Boom Restaurant near the powder magazine, overlooking the dockyard.

On Tuesday 21 May we viewed the beautifully restored and furnished Clarence House. This former commissioner’s, then dockyard supervisor’s house, was built 1804–6, on the hill overlooking English Harbour. From 1856 it became the official country residence for the Governors of Antigua and the Leeward Islands but was ruined by three hurricanes in the 1990s. In 2016 it was re-opened, completely rebuilt for $3.3m provided by millionaire yachtsman Sir Peter Harrison. We then visited the ruins of Shirley Heights military base, the cemetery at Blockhouse Hill and Dow’s Hill Interpretation Centre.

On Wednesday 22 May we experienced Betty’s Hope Plantation, Fort James, Fort Barrington (captured 1652, this fort erected 1779), and island capital St John’s, including Antigua museum and cathedral. A small museum interpreted the plantation well and the two windmills have been superbly
restored, but the site suffers from erosion by goats and a lack of maintenance. The windmill machinery came from England, restored by Lawson M. Whiting of New York. The trains were supplied by Gregg of New York. The sugar-boiling pan was made by Carron Ironworks. In the evening Reg Murphy and Chris and Tori Waters dined with us.

On Thursday 23 May we made a concluding informal visit to the dockyard, where some members took the courtesy boat to the Boom Restaurant for coffee. Most delegates enjoyed a restful last day on the 24th, but two took the shuttle bus into St John’s for further exploration. They discovered the Police Station, Governor-General’s House, prison, Botanical Gardens and historic Redcliffe Quay. One found The Best of Books bookshop.

This is a mere overview. The enthusiasm of our guides, bus drivers and local people brought a beautiful landscape and seascape to life. We saw the major military sites and had plenty of time to explore the Dockyard. Antigua has a wonderful relaxing atmosphere and depths of history and culture.

Celia and Deane Clark report the effect of the development of new tourist-related uses on English Harbour surroundings.

In Chris Waters’ talk introducing us to the dockyard and its designation as a World Heritage site he said that there was a requirement for a second access road to the yard as another means of escape. The new road snakes up the hill above the dockyard, leaving a scar that is clearly visible from Clarence House across the harbour. He said that they plan to plant trees to hide it. When I explored it, I did not see many new trees, but there were several other useful new facilities: a small sewage plant, a large space for rubbish from visiting yachts and somewhere to deposit their waste oil. Graham Knight of Antigua Sails, a business that has been going for fifty years, told me that the road was needed, particularly if there is a fire in the yard. It was only approachable by the narrow road to the entrance between a rock face and the Admiral’s Inn before it was built. The chain across the road at the other end is only there at the end of the season – i.e. in May. There is a desalination plant at the back of the peninsula.

Antigua Sails – a privately owned business in a large new building up a side road – used to manufacture sails inside the dockyard, but like most of the yacht-related industry, moved out of the dockyard when the buildings such as the Copper and Lumber Store were converted to tourist use – in that case, self-catering apartments with bar, restaurant and meeting places below. Antigua Sails needed more space. The only original yacht-related industry still in the dockyard is electronics. The chandlery also moved out. Antigua Sails now manufactures canvas products and lets the large sail loft on the ground floor to another sailmaker.

When Graham and his business partner Rena first set up Antigua Sails fifty years ago there was not much yachting – in Falmouth or the dockyard; chartering was not big then. There was only the yacht club and a little village to the east. It has grown by 75% and so has Falmouth village. They are now joined together. Bars, shops and restaurants were all closed when I explored it because it was the end of the season, but a well-stocked supermarket at the head of English Harbour caters for local people and visitors.

Falmouth Harbour is one of the few deep-water harbours in the Caribbean which is not a commercial harbour with cranes and big ships unloading. It belongs to Antigua, controlled by National Parks and Port Authority. Its three marinas are privately owned and managed. Super yachts can get in via the deep-water channel and tie up at the docks. There are few places like this in Antigua. Commercial shipping goes to St John’s where freight is offloaded.

Graham Knight has a connection with Alverstoke in Gosport where he owns a house. His relative Simon Shoesmith has a business in Royal Clarence Yard. Graham said that piles from Royal Clarence Yard are said to have been reused in the slipway at English Harbour. They had the broad arrow mark on them. There are other ties with Portsmouth: ships sail back and forth bringing supplies.

They gave me the Antigua and Barbuda Marine Guide for 2018, which was typeset and ready to be uploaded to the printers when Hurricane Irma struck. The guide is printed in Sarasota Florida and Hurricane Irma affected their ability to receive the copies. ‘People stocked up and battened down for the expected exceptionally strong winds. However . . . Antigua was spared the worst and it was back to business after a day or two.’ They also gave me a beautiful brochure of the 32nd Annual
Antigua Classic Yacht Regatta, which took place this April. Over dinner Dr Reg Murphy told us of his ambition to build a replica Antiguan schooner in the dockyard, and his plan to visit Buckler's Hard in the New Forest when he comes to Paris in October for the UNESCO National Commission of which he is Secretary General. As he also worked on the restoration of one of the Betty's Hope Plantation windmills and Chris Waters would also like to know more about the origins of the bricks of which the dockyard was built, Deane and I are offering to arrange a visit for him to Bursledon Brickworks and Windmill which belong to the Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust.

The St James’s Club in Mamora Bay where we were staying is opposite Graham’s house, and the noise from it is a nuisance, particularly on Thursdays’ Caribbean nights! Local people would very much like to see the restored Clarence House, but so far there’s been no response to their requests. Clarence House, the Dockyard Commissioner’s residence, later also used by the governor of Antigua in the summer months, was one of the highlights of our trip. It was brilliantly restored after it was severely damaged in a hurricane. Local craftspeople including stonemasons, carpenters and decorators made a first-class job, so much so that it’s hard to believe that it’s a replica. It is beautifully furnished with original early nineteenth century tables, chairs, prints – and some excellent reproductions. Sensibly, wedding and other party guests are not allowed inside! There is a separate professional kitchen and other facilities around a brick terrace where guests can celebrate. Deane and I were reminded of Uppark near Petersfield, also a remarkable replica of the house where Nelson stayed on his way to and from Portsmouth, fully recreated by the National Trust after a disastrous fire.

Jane Bowden-Dan comments: The NDS’s Study Tour was, for me, truly wonderful. Soon on arriving at St John’s airport after the eight-and-a-half-hour flight, I was entranced by the tropical birds and bright colours of bougainvillea and so many other plants. Our visits to English Harbour Dockyard were probably the highlights of a truly fascinating trip. Not only a Study Tour, but a first holiday across the Atlantic for me: I revelled in the facilities of the all-inclusive St James’s Club resort (especially the restaurants!). The week was both mind- and body-stretching, because I went sea-bathing in both bays in the complex and could not resist dancing at the Beach Party on Thursday evening.

The leader concludes: In appreciation of the time and effort dedicated by Drs Murphy and Waters and Ms Gardner and the marvellous work being carried out at the dockyard, we agreed to donate the remaining balance of our tour fees (£515) to Antigua Naval Dockyard to purchase an item in the name of the NDS.

Reg Murphy has the last word: ‘Our heritage is your heritage.’

Dr Ann Coats

All photos by the author except The Officers’ Quarters, courtesy Ian Stafford, and the Group at Clarence House, courtesy Ian Stafford’s camera.

Royal Clarence Yard Gosport, the ‘dispersed depots’ and Victualling Stores supply from WW2 to closure

The Royal Clarence Victualling Yard (RCY) Gosport was built between 1828 and 1832, to replace various sites at Portsmouth and to concentrate all victualling operations on the Gosport side of the harbour. The site at Gosport already had a cooperage at what was known as Weevil Yard, that was renamed Royal Clarence Yard in 1831 after the Duke of Clarence, Lord High Admiral, whose support had been largely responsible for building the new Yard.

Until World War Two the Victualling Department’s activities in the Portsmouth area were entirely centred on RCY, but following German bombing stocks were dispersed to locations away from Gosport. After the war storage of the full range of victualling stores never returned to RCY. Today the surviving historic buildings are well known and carefully preserved, but the wartime ‘dispersed’ and later post-war depots seem to have been largely forgotten.
The former Admiralty Victualling Department became part of the RN Supply & Transport Service (RNSTS) on 1 January 1965. The author spent most of his career in the RNSTS including appointments in both food and clothing supply. He has consulted Mr R. A. Sykes OBE, who was SVSO (see below) in charge of Royal Clarence Yard from 1978 to 1985, and later Head of Victualling (HV) at the Headquarters in Bath.

Particular thanks are due to Mr Sykes for making available the document Brief History of the Victualling Department in the Southern Area during the 1939/45 War, dated 26th September 1947. This has now been passed to the Hampshire Record Office (and a copy to the NDS library). Thanks also to Mr Vernon Hughes for loan of his collection of The Victualler magazine.

The title of ‘Superintendent’ in charge of the Yard changed to Superintending Victualling Store Officer (SVSO) in early 1942 to reflect the ‘Area’ concept of ‘dispersed’ stockholdings.

The Victualling supply task
There were three broad ranges of victualling stores:

- **Provisions (food):** dry provisions (tinned, cased and bagged), fresh provisions and (later) frozen provisions. Rum, tobacco and duty-free cigarettes were also part of the Provisions range.
- **Clothing:** RN Officers and ratings, Royal Marines (from 1951), WRNS and QARNNS uniform together with associated badges. Also uniform for various minor groups of ‘uniformed’ Service and civilian personnel. Functional/protective (‘Loan’) clothing and other specialized ranges, such as Fleet Air Arm ‘flying clothing’.
- **Mess Gear:** mess traps and utensils, implements and galley gear – everything necessary for preparing, cooking, serving and eating food.

Until after World War Two the Victualling Department was also responsible for the supply of water at the Dockyard ports, which at RCY came from the large reservoir fed from a nearby well. Delivery to ships was by water boats and lighters, crewed by (Dockyard) Yard Craft personnel.

Dispersal of stocks following war damage
With the increased wartime activity an acute shortage of covered storage space rapidly developed, and more was hastily obtained in the local area, at Hoeford (near Fareham), a Church Hall and Boys’ Club in Gosport, and a large shed in Southampton docks. From late 1940 onwards RCY suffered increasing air raids resulting in significant damage, climaxing with a very severe raid on 10 March 1941. Hundreds of incendiaries followed by HE bombs were dropped, causing enormous destruction and loss of a vast quantity of stores, as well as over 200,000 square feet of storage space – about half.

As well as the southern wing of the Mill/Granary building, the following were completely destroyed: Salt Meat Store, Implement Store, Miscellaneous Store, Clothing Store, Cooperage Shed and other smaller buildings. The imposing main office building with all its records and stock accounts was also burnt out. RCY had developed a particularly efficient Fire Guard Organization, and but for the heroic efforts of all concerned the Yard could have been totally lost.

Further enemy air raids followed as the search for additional dispersed sites intensified, due both to the vulnerability of RCY and the RN’s greater use of ports away from Portsmouth. This was replicated at other Victualling Yards across the country, and to manage the large number of depots being established the Victualling Department introduced an ‘Area’ organisation. ‘Southern Area’ (SA) was one of six in England, together with a slightly different organizational structure in Scotland and Northern Ireland. In January and February 1942 the SA Headquarters was established at Thatcham (Berks), and appropriate staff transferred from RCY. There was also a dispersed depot at Thatcham.

Depots were also established at the following locations: Bournemouth, Godalming, Guildford, Handley (Woodyates House – Dorset), Lewes, Milborne St Andrew (Dorset), Peasmarsh (Surrey), Woolston (Southampton – Naval Store Dept) and Warnford Farm near Winchester. At some places there was more than one depot. Although described as ‘depots’ quite a few hardly justified that description; varying widely in size and suitability, from a chair factory, stables and a piggery, to more conventional storage. Storage space was still inadequate and in September 1943 a holding of 67,000 square feet in a linoleum factory at Staines was transferred from Eastern Area. The surviving storage at RCY was operated as a depot for urgent demands from ships at Portsmouth, for fresh and...
dry provisions, seamen’s clothing, soap, tobacco and mess gear. In practice, despite RCY’s vulnerability, greater quantities were held because of lack of space elsewhere.

D-Day and the end of the War
Preparations for D-Day were intense with further temporary depots acquired and stocks progressively built up in readiness. A particular problem was provision of bread for so many men, overcome by installation of an Army Mobile Field Bakery within RCY. Assembly for the assault began early in April 1944 and from then on RCY and the other depots worked under great pressure. The arrangements worked well both on D-Day and afterwards.

As late as 1945 storage problems were still acute and several large country houses were taken over for storage as lock-up stores. There followed the challenge of huge returns of stores from ships paying off and shore establishments reducing to a peace-time role. RCY was used as the Returns Depot. At the end of the war Southern Area comprised twenty-four separate depots and sub-depots, which had reduced to ten by the end of 1946. At the end of 1945 the Area Headquarters moved to Roche Court, Fareham, where it remained until 1961 when the staff moved to a replacement office building in RCY.

Post-war depots at Frater and Botley
After the war a victualling depot was created at Frater in Gosport, about two miles from RCY, but the actual date is not known. Its purpose may have been to accelerate closure of the wartime depots and to simplify operations by holding stocks nearer to RCY. The depot had two large sheds and was adjacent to the RN Armament Depot but not actually within its perimeter. The photograph reproduced overleaf shows dry provisions being moved, but clothing and mess gear may also have been held. It continued as a victualling depot until at least 1967.
Plans for a new purpose-built victualling depot of some 200,000 square feet of modern storage at Botley, on the eastern outskirts of Southampton, were approved in November 1950 and construction started the following year, the first stage (four sheds) becoming operational in summer 1953. The site was three miles from the village of Botley, which led to confusion, and in later years the depot was also known as Burnett’s Lane. It held mostly dry provisions (which were not stored at RCY) and also (initially) clothing and mess gear. Stocks of naval clothing were centralized at Plymouth in late 1965, except for functional protective clothing which was retained in Victualling Yards. Mess gear was moved back to RCY in the mid-1960s, where re-provision of destroyed wartime storage had at last begun.

Rum, although part of the dry provisions range, was blended and stored in the Rum Store at RCY that had lost its top storey in the wartime bombing. The Cooperage, built in the 1760s, continued to manufacture and renovate wooden casks until the lead-up to abolition of the rum issue on 31 July 1970.

Frozen and fresh provisions

The author has not been able to establish whether there was any refrigerated facility for frozen provisions during World War Two. Post-war the Cold Store was situated in RCY for supply to ships and local shore establishments: those further afield were supplied under ‘direct supply’ contracts. Holding stocks for local shore establishments gave flexibility to manage shelf lives and ‘returns’ from ships, particularly those going into refit or paying-off. Arrangements for fresh provisions in earlier times are also uncertain, but by the 1970s, supplies to ships were normally made direct by contractor, except for those moored in the harbour or at anchor in the Solent. Because of the short shelf life only limited stocks were held in RCY.

Harbour craft and lighters

Supplies for ships not ‘alongside’ had to be loaded into lighters, either ‘dumb’ or self-propelled, and these were also often used as an alternative to the road journey around the harbour, avoiding the not uncommon congestion on the Dockyard wharves. Lighters and water boats were originally managed by SVSO’s organization but later transferred to the Port Auxiliary Service (PAS).

Rationalization of supply arrangements following the formation of the unified Ministry of Defence

The creation of the unified Ministry of Defence on 1 April 1964 heralded a series of studies to rationalize the supply functions of the three single-Service departments, which directly affected the victualling task.

From 1 April 1966 the Navy Department became responsible for food supply policy and provisioning, procurement, storage and distribution of foodstuffs for all three Services. This entailed supply
down to Army Command Supply Depot level and to RAF Stations in the UK. There was no change to RN customers. The Navy Department also became responsible for supply of dry provisions to main depots overseas, where local contracts were let for fresh and frozen supplies. The new arrangements vastly increased the food supply task at Botley, which now encompassed supply of dry provisions to the Army and RAF over a swathe of southern England and to BAOR Germany.

The Army’s packing line at Taunton producing Operational Ration Packs (ORP – or ‘Compo’) used by the Army and Royal Marines on operations and exercises was transferred to Botley as a victualling responsibility. The line produced some four million rations a year.

Also from 1 April 1966 the Army Department assumed various lead roles for clothing for all three Services, although the RN retained responsibility for design policy and stockholding of naval clothing. At the same time the Air Force Department took over responsibility for the supply of ‘Accommodation Stores’ to the three Services, which included the victualling range of Mess Gear, although limited ‘buffer’ stocks were retained at RCY for supply to ships.

With the MoD’s management of food supply now under a single organization food safety/inspection, arrangements were reorganized. The former Victualling Department’s specialist Technical Examining Officers transferred to a new Armed Services Food Laboratory (ASFL), a part of the Laboratory of the Government Chemist. This was located within RCY with a remit to support the MoD’s food supply business worldwide. The ASFL also provided professional oversight of MoD’s locally based Food Inspectors in the Victualling Yards.

Overall ‘the Service’ in the form of Victualling Yards/Depots and MoD direct supply contracts supplied about 90% of RN food requirements. The balance (‘non-Service’) was supplied by commercial suppliers and NAAFI, but almost entirely by the latter from the early 1970s. NAAFI’s food supply activity was separate from their better known ‘canteen’ business. The proportion for Army and RAF units (in UK) was, for historical reasons, nearer a 50:50 split.

Support of military operations

RCY had a significant role in supporting military operations in both the Falklands and Gulf wars. In April 1982 RCY/Botley stored the ships of the main Falklands Task Force with food supplies in five days, including the Royal Fleet Auxiliary stores ship *Stromness* that was stored from empty with 15,000 man/months of provisions. Thereafter as well as storing HM ships preparing to sail south, RCY stored all of the bulk food supply ships (banana boats) that had been requisitioned against very tight deadlines, at a rate of one ship every two weeks.

Later as conditions on the Falklands normalized these bulk carriers were replaced by container ships, necessitating conversion of part of RCY into a mini-container terminal with storage and handling facilities for 20ft dry and refrigerated containers. This facility was used again in 1991 for shipments to the Army Depot at Al Jubail in Saudi Arabia during the (first) Gulf War.
Food supplies are not normally transported by air (as too bulky/heavy/costly) but following the start of normal messing in the Falklands special arrangements were made to supply short shelf life salad gear etc., in specially made temperature-controlled containers via the ‘air bridge’ from RAF Brize Norton to Ascension (including ships transiting) and the Falklands. This required much ‘hands on’ management by RCY staff to get right including close liaison with RAF Brize Norton. The arrangement was unique as at that time there was no source of locally grown produce on the islands.

Changing food and clothing supply arrangements and final closure of RCY

In the early 1990s the Conservative Government sought to expose elements of Government business to ‘market testing’ and supply of food to the Armed Services became a candidate activity. Following a consultancy study Ministers decided that full responsibility for supply of food (excluding Operational Ration Packs) should be passed to NAAFI from 1 October 1994, and at the end of an initial three-year contract proceed to full market testing. The task was progressively transferred as ‘Service’ stocks were run down. However, the new supply arrangements did not run smoothly, leading to critical newspaper headlines, an adverse National Audit Office Report, and verdict by MPs of ‘a minor debacle’. When the business was exposed to full competition in 1997 NAAFI lost the contract, which MoD has placed with commercial suppliers ever since.

Meanwhile a new tri-Service Defence Clothing and Textiles Authority (DCTA) was established on 1 April 1994 and absorbed the naval clothing task. Naval stocks were transferred to the former Army Depot at Bicester.

Royal Clarence Yard closed shortly after NAAFI’s assumption of responsibility for supply of food on 1 October 1994, but the author has not been able to establish the exact date.

Bernard Mennell

References

TNA – The National Archives of the UK
1 Southern Area unreferenced document dated 26th September 1947. See also letter dated 4th October 1944 from Commander-in-Chief Portsmouth to Secretary of the Admiralty and its attached SVSO Southern Area report – TNA ADM199/1643 (Folios 393–400).
2 Hampshire Telegraph and Portsmouth Evening News (both newspapers) 10 April 1953.
4 Defence Council Instruction (General) 19/66 – TNA DEFE 73/22.
5 Defence Council Instructions (General) 36/94 and 307/94 – TNA DEFE 73/61.
STOP PRESS – breaking news on a sale of RCY in mid-September 2019, as Martin Marks reports:

UK Docks have announced their recent acquisition of the remaining 5.7 acres of Royal Clarence Yard in Gosport. The yard includes a number of listed buildings, including the Steam Fire Engine House and the remains of the railway station used by Queen Victoria. The site was offered to Gosport Borough Council for £1 but rejected because of the huge infrastructural renewal required. UK Docks have had experience of taking over derelict facilities on four occasions and plan to inject ‘millions’ into the Gosport site

UK Docks provides a comprehensive range of dry dock and marine services with other facilities including a headquarters in Tyneside, Teesside, the Tamar Estuary and Gosport (Endeavour Quay).

https://www.ukdocks.com/our-yards-facilities

Our Chair Dr Ann Coats comments further:

It is notable that this site has been purchased by a maritime company which already operates ‘new build, refit, maintenance and repair services for commercial and private vessels’ at Endavour Quay, Mumby Rd, Gosport. ‘UK Docks plans to invest significantly in the site and convert it into a marine service centre for the local industry.’ (https://www.business-live.co.uk/ports-logistics/tynesides-uk-docks-buys-historic-16909986) This is in contrast with the housing development company Berkeley Homes, which developed another part of Royal Clarence Yard mainly as residential with some commercial use from 2000. This project does not exclude residential development, but the buildings on this site are more industrial than residential.

It is positive in that maritime operations will continue there, but how well will UK Docks care for the listed buildings?

The East, West and South Cooperage ranges (1766) were used for making barrels for the Navy’s rum issue until it was discontinued in 1970. They surround the former cooper’s square in which barrels were stacked. The South range incorporates the original brewery wall of 1764. Its buildings are the ‘oldest to survive in any victualling yard’. (Coad, 2013, 309)

The North Meadow Workshops and Fire Engine House include artificers’ workshops, with guardhouse, 1802–1803 and 1811. They were built under the direction of General Bentham, Inspector General of Naval Works and later by Navy Board Surveyor of Buildings G. L. Taylor. This is believed to be a unique survival of workshops for the Royal Military Artificers, established in 1784, and in 1813 renamed Royal Sappers and Miners. Carpenters and builders constructed military buildings and fortresses.

Beyond Bernard Mennell’s excellent article above, accounts of the buildings may be found in the following works by NDS members:


D. Evans, Royal Clarence Yard – some buildings reconsidered (Gosport Borough Council, 1999)


An 1891 Visit to Chatham Dockyard

The visit of the members of the Institution of Naval Architects to Chatham occurs, in some respects, at an unfortunate time. They will see a great dockyard at its worst. A fortnight ago there steamed out of the huge No. 3 basin, between ten o’clock and two, ships enough to constitute a fairly powerful fleet. As the tide rose and the increasing depth of water over the shoal places in the Medway permitted their passage, the Salamander, Skipjack, Sheldrake, Medusa, Medea, Mersey, Narcissus and Sans Pareil were in turn despatched down the river. Their united armaments amounted to nearly sixty guns, varying in size from the 110-ton guns of the Sans Pareil to the 4.7 inch quick-firers in the three Salamanders. The orderly procession of ships of constantly increasing size and power
formed a very interesting sight . . . But though one of our principal naval yards be taken at its worst, it will seldom be found bare. There are always a number of obsolete ships in port which are of historic interest by reason of their services, and of scientific interest in measuring the progress which has been made in warship construction. There are vessels under repair which have but recently seen active service, and which will soon be as good as ever; and there are new vessels in process of construction. This is just the case at Chatham. There are now being repaired and re-armed in the three basins a number of vessels which would probably overpower in fair fight the fleet which steamed away to the manoeuvres, which are certainly superior in armour and gun power and are only decidedly inferior in speed. And a third fleet which is being built at the present time, would with the greatest ease, and without any doubt whatever, overhaul and capture or destroy either of the other two, and very possibly defeat, under some circumstances, the other two combined . . .

It will be seen that the dockyard is composed of a rather narrow strip on the eastern bank of the Medway, together with a large area enclosed by a bend in the river. This larger part was formerly St Mary’s Island. A narrow channel, along which small vessels could pass at high water, separated it from the dockyard. The three basins lie nearly along the course of this channel. They are together nearly 70 acres in extent, and are absolutely necessary, seeing that there is no accommodation along the whole river front for a single large ship of war. In this respect Chatham is at a great disadvantage compared with Portsmouth, where vessels can either anchor in the tideway or lie alongside the yard . . .

The railway enters the yard near the third or eastern basin, which communicates with the Medway by two large locks, closed by sliding caissons. All the other basins and docks have the ordinary floating caissons. On the further side of this basin is the 160-ton crane close to which are lying the boilers and engines of the Brilliant, a second-class cruiser building at Sheerness . . . On the northern side of the second basin are several wooden hulks, used by the Medway Steam reserve, including an old sailing ship – the Forte – and several screw wooden line of battle ships. And on the west side is the Andromache, a second-class cruiser, which has just successfully completed her steam trials. In the eastern or first basin we find the Arethusa, Blake and Rambler – surveying vessel – and in the large docks opening into the basin the Apollo, Hood and Terpischore. The unsightly sponsons at the ends of Arethusa are being removed. This ship, like the Mersey, has not yet been commissioned, except for the manoeuvres of the past year or two . . .


Editor’s note
I am nearing the end of a part-time MPhil at Newcastle University and have found the MTSC very helpful in my researches. Its collection of books and archive material is outstanding and I was shown this extract on a visit. My MPhil is on UK shipbreaking 1945–95 and the MTSC has the extant records of the major UK shipbreakers as well as inter alia shipbuilders. Contact Dr Brian Newman on brian.newman@newcastle.ac.uk to arrange a visit, you will be made most welcome.

ACHQ Chatham / HMS Wildfire

In 1937, with tensions rising in Europe over the territorial ambitions of Nazi Germany, the British Government adopted a policy of providing protected combined headquarters accommodation for all three armed services at the four main naval dockyards of Portsmouth, Plymouth, Chatham and Rosyth. In March 1938, the Admiralty wrote to C-in-C of the Nore Command, Vice Admiral Sir Edward Evans, to inform him that an Area Combined Headquarters (ACHQ) would be established at Chatham which would house the Commanders of the Naval and Air (No. 16 Group RAF Coastal Command) Forces operating in the area and at which the Commander of the local Army forces would also be represented, either by a Military Liaison Officer or, if circumstances demanded, by the Army Commander himself.
Discussions between the three local Commanders soon commenced and by May 1938 they had identified three possible sites for the ACHQ. As Chatham Dockyard was considered to be a prime target for enemy bombing in time of war, the preferred site was about two miles distant from the dockyard, which would consist of several bomb-splinter-proof surface buildings and would be to a great extent camouflaged by the building of small houses currently going on around the site. It also had the advantage, from the RAF point of view, that it was relatively close the civil aerodrome at Rochester. However, it was also acknowledged that a project for forming an underground Combined Services Operations Block and Group Headquarters on or near the Great Lines at Chatham had been put forward by the Army Commander Chatham Area. The main objection to this suggestion was that the Group HQ and Operations Block would both be within the main target area at Chatham.

Despite this objection the decision was taken to construct the ACHQ underground on the Lower Lines, close to the Chatham Naval Barracks and the Nore C-in-C's Residence at Admiralty House. The Lower Lines were a series of dry moats built in 1804 as an extension to the Great Lines, which served to defend Chatham Dockyard from landward attack.

By March 1939 plans for the new ACHQ had been drawn up with costs estimated at £24,000. The costs would be divided between the three services according to their respective areas of occupation, with the Navy taking 51%, the RAF 45.5% and the Army 3.5%. The contract for construction was awarded to the Francois Cementation Company and work commenced in May 1939.

Just weeks into the construction it was considered necessary to lower the levels of the ACHQ to obtain the maximum possible cover of chalk consistent with remaining at a safe distance above the standing level of ground water. It was also found necessary to modify the general layout of the underground offices to meet revised requirements of the Naval and Military staffs and a short length of tunnel was added to accommodate an auxiliary generating plant. The RAF also requested the floor of the Plotting Room to be lowered to provide a better view of the plotting table from their observation cabins. At the same time the opportunity was taken to modify the arrangement of entrances to give access from the adjoining moat.

By June, the project and costs were being revised further to accommodate the inclusion of a separate teleprinter room that was to be built in the moat. This would provide a connection to the recently established Defence Teleprinter Network. The cost of the Teleprinter Room was estimated at £1,200 and the ACHQ cost estimate had risen to £25,000. The division of costs was also amended with the Admiralty now taking 52%, the Air Ministry 43% and the War Department 5%.

On completion of the tunnels in December 1939, the complement of the ACHQ was sixty officers and ninety ‘other ranks’ from all three services. The ACHQ was constructed of steel mine hoops under corrugated-iron sheeting with interior panelling; the plotting room was much larger with 40ft-diameter steel segments. The tunnels entered the plotting room at first-floor level, requiring
steel stairs at each end to gain access to the plotting floor, which was effectively in a pit. A viewing platform overlooked the plotting table at the eastern end. The plotting room originally had three glass-fronted cabins at floor level. However, their position was raised when the work on lowering the floor was completed and the cabins now overlooked the plotting table and the vertical map boards opposite.

In February 1940 arrangements were put in hand for the provision of extra lavatory accommodation and a car park for the use of the ACHQ staff. The estimated costs were put at £1,400 for the lavatory accommodation and £800 for the car park. However, the introduction of WRNS personnel onto the ACHQ staff necessitated a further review in June. The WRNS would require separate accommodation and rest rooms. This and other revisions, which included the provision of surface hutted accommodation off the Medway Road for RAF administrative staff and WRNS personnel, as well as a NAAFI, had increased the overall cost estimate to £36,000. Even though an invasion of the UK was now considered imminent, it did not stop the Treasury expressing its disquiet over the escalating costs which, in their opinion, included work of a ‘luxury nature’ unjustifiable in war and they considered that the original approved estimates had been ‘improperly exceeded’. The criticisms were aimed mainly at the provision of the car park with its cycle and motor-cycle sheds. Treasury officials even demanded that the ACHQ staff should be charged for using the sheds. The Admiralty responded by saying that the provision of cycle racks in Royal Dockyards had been accepted as an Admiralty responsibility for many years and was considered standard practice for all good employers. Moreover, many of the ACHQ staff would be arriving during the ‘silent hours’ when no other form of transport was available to them. The Treasury eventually relented and agreed that no charge should be made for use of the racks. The other cost increases, which included £3,500 for built-in furniture to replace portable furniture due to the lack of space for the latter, and £1,800 for a ramped tunnel connecting to the C-in-C’s surface offices, were also accepted as justifiable under the current war conditions.

By November 1940 the ACHQ staff levels had increased to 63 officers and 119 other ranks, an increase of over 20%. The majority of the personnel were made up of the Commanders, Chiefs of Staff, Staff Officers and advisors together with signals and communications teams and some GPO staff. Both RN and RAF had wireless telegraphy (W/T) facilities within the HQ. Two large wooden masts were on the surface above the HQ with the main Nore W/T station about one and a half miles away, north of the river Medway at Beacon Hill, Chattenden. The Defence Teleprinter Network (DTN) terminal for the entire Chatham area was now located within the new HQ.

Access to the ACHQ was provided by two entrance tunnels, one in the south of the complex from a Nissen Hut in the Medway Road Camp and the other from the moat to the north. An emergency exit was also provided into the moat by way of three vertical ladders up an air shaft from the plant-room area.

The ACHQ operated throughout the war and after, into the Cold War period, when it took a major
part in various NATO exercises. In 1956 the wartime Nissen Hut entrance was replaced with a small brick-built entrance building. As a result of the 1957 Defence Review, the Royal Navy's Nore Command was disbanded in 1961 and the ACHQ closed a year later.

As another result of the Defence Review, the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) was absorbed into the Royal Naval Reserve (RNR). Among the new shore service roles for the RNR were the RNR HQ Units working in Maritime HQs at the Major Ports. The former ACHQ was an obvious choice for Chatham’s Maritime Local Command HQ (LCHQ). During 1962 and 1963 various alterations were made to the internal layout of the site, with additional services such as mains water and, most importantly, sewage disposal. This entailed the construction of a new chamber adjacent to the southern entrance to hold a large water tank, below this a sump was built with sewage ejection equipment enabling the toilets opposite to be connected to the mains and four extra toilets to be provided within the new room.

The naming of the new LCHQ was the cause of some debate within the Admiralty. The Flag Officer Medway proposed that it should be given a ship’s name and suggested HMS Tyrwhitt as being most suitable. However, when the proposal was put before the Ships’ Names Committee it was rejected as it had always been their policy not to use the names of Admirals who had served within ‘living memory’. (Admiral of the Fleet Sir Reginald Tyrwhitt had served in the First World War and his son, Admiral Sir St John Tyrwhitt, had only retired from service in 1961.) It was thought, by the Committee, that a considerable period of time (‘preferably a century’) should elapse before such a name should be brought into use. Another suggestion, Mountevans, was rejected for the same reason and a third, Achilles, had already been reserved for the use of the Royal New Zealand Navy. However, a fourth suggestion, Wildfire, was deemed acceptable.

HMS Wildfire had been the Flagship of C-in-C Nore between 1890 and 1907. More recently it had been the name of the Royal Navy’s Shore Establishment at Sheerness during the Second World War and until the base’s closure in 1960.

The name HMS Wildfire was given final approval on 16 July 1964 and the new Chatham LCHQ was commissioned as such on 10 September 1964.

The function of the unit was to provide a trained and stable staff for plotting and communications duties in the Flag Officer Medway's LCHQ in time of war. The reservist ratings received training in both skills, in addition officers specialized in Naval Control of Shipping (NCS), Mine Counter Measure (MCM) and Intelligence duties.

When the Chatham Naval Base closed in 1984, the requirement for the Reserve HQ unit ceased and it too closed in 1985 and the LCHQ was vacated and sealed. The surface entrance block was later demolished and the main entrance tunnel backfilled.

An RNR unit continued to operate at Chatham in the guise of a Communications Training Centre (CTC) based at the Collingwood Block in Khyber Road. The block had originally been part of the Detention Quarters at the RN’s Chatham Barracks, HMS Pembroke. The Detention Quarters closed
in 1931 and the block was then used as a Mechanical Training Establishment and later as the Dockyard Training College until the RN left Chatham in 1984. The name HMS Wildfire was transferred to the CTC which continued to operate at Collingwood Block until its closure in 1994. The name HMS Wildfire continues to be used for the RNR unit at the Permanent Joint Headquarters at Northolt.

The tunnels on the Lower Lines did not stay sealed for long. Intruders gained access and started a fire in the Operations Room causing some extensive damage to the fabric of the structure. The complex has been accessible a few times for very short periods over the years but, at the time of writing, remains very well sealed.

Clive Holden

Sources
TNA ADM 1/11119 Combined Defence Operational Headquarters 1937–41
TNA ADM 1/10956 Chatham Area Combined Headquarters Estimate of Costs
TNA ADM 1/28651 Name of Headquarters, Chatham Reserve Unit 1963–64
TNA ADM 1/16263 Admiralty Administration Combined Operations and Naval Stations

DATES FOR THE DIARY

20 November 2019
ADM106 and the Navy Board Project – conference at National Research Archives, Kew.
Members have already been circulated, please address any enquiries to our Chair Ann Coats on avcoatsndschair@gmail.com

March/April 2020 (date to be agreed)
Ray Riley study day in Portsmouth.
During the collation of Dr Ray Riley’s obituary tributes in Transactions 12, a NDS member suggested a study day to honour Ray’s memory and provide a fitting memorial to his academic endeavours. Portsmouth City Council Library & Archive Service will host the study day. Portsmouth History Centre, the NDS and Ray’s former University of Portsmouth Geography Department colleagues will assemble a series of papers by Ray’s academic friends on subjects in which he was interested. Enquiries to avcoatsndschair@gmail.com

4 April 2020
Conference organizer Philip MacDougall (Philip.macdougall@btinternet.com) has assembled an exciting programme with papers on subjects including Fremantle Submarine base, aspects of dockyards at Hong Kong and Trincomalee and on Mysore, but has room for one more speaker. Contact him if you are interested.

2021 (date to be finalised)
International conference at Portsmouth – ‘Building a sailing ship’ is the working title for this interesting event.