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Welcome from the editor

Our cover picture of the Fourth Rate Tyger of 1681 comes from Richard Endsor's excellent looking new book Master Shipwright's Secrets. The Tyger was built at Deptford under the supervision of Master Shipwright John Shish. A full review of the book will appear in our next issue.

We hope readers are coping under the coronavirus restrictions and may like to browse Chatham Dockyard's collection of dockyard artefacts online at https://collection.thedockyard.co.uk/discover-the-collection. This has been really well presented and gives a lead for other dockyards to follow.

We are pleased that there has been some significant maintenance work on the historic buildings at risk in Portsmouth Dockyard. In particular, on the Parade, the roof has been comprehensively repaired and other stabilisation work undertaken, and repairs made to the roof truss of the Iron & Brass Foundry East Wing, and to the cupola on the Old Naval Academy. There still remains quite a bit still to be done on other buildings and a full progress report will appear in the next issue.

Not such good news at Sheerness, where listed buildings including the Boat Store continue to be neglected. The trees have sadly been felled next to the Military Hospital. We understand though that matched funding has been raised for the Dockyard Church project and building work can commence. The Society may be running a tour of certain parts of the dockyard in the autumn, visiting at least the Church and two of the restored houses in the Officers' Quarter.

Commissioned in 1973, HMS Bristol served in the Falklands conflict and since 1993 she has been a fixture in Portsmouth Dockyard, replacing HMS Kent as a training and accommodation ship by Whale Island. The Navy have said she is surplus to requirements from the end of this year. A Type 82 destroyer, there were moves afoot to preserve her as a museum ship as we went to press. She has historical significance from the Falklands but it is believed her armament, for example, has been stripped and she is something generally of a shell.

The NDS committee have been considering an ambitious but very worthwhile project: to create a global database of naval dockyard buildings. Matters are at an early stage, but we would be pleased to hear from anyone who has experience of building and maintaining a relational database and would like to be involved. Please contact Paul Brown (paul.brown206@btinternet.com) if you are interested. This will be a complex task, and we wish to ensure that it is thoroughly discussed before we proceed.

David Baynes has resigned from the committee, having been a dedicated and encouraging committee member since 2006. In that period, he has fulfilled superbly the role in organising the printing and distribution of Dockyards and Transactions. He has also liaised with other maritime organisations and located suitable venues for our London committee meetings. David is kindly continuing to distribute our publications.

We are sorry to report that Philip MacDougall, a co-founder of our Society, has for personal reasons also stepped down from the committee. Philip’s particular interest is the political, social and economic factors that underpin the navies of the world’s sea powers during the age of fighting sail. Philip has also written widely on the subject of naval dockyards and those who worked within these yards, having made a detailed study of Chatham Dockyard. Nicholas Blake takes over as editor of Transactions.

Many thanks to Nicholas Blake and Rachel Smyth for their expert help in producing this newsletter.

Richard Holme, editor, richardholme@btinternet.com

Navy Board Project concludes successfully

Gilly Hughes, who took over as coordinator of the Navy Board Project at The National Archives in 2016 from Sue Lumas, who was suffering from ill health, was presented with a TNA Volunteer award at the event to celebrate the completion of the Navy Board Project at The National Archives, Kew on 20 November 2019. Forty people attended this enthralling free event, enjoying the variety and complexity of the ADM 106 series and its applications. We thank Gilly for taking over as TNA coordinator and also Bruno Pappalardo, Principal Record Specialist Manager, for his dedication to the Project. But most of all we thank Sue Lumas, who began the Project when she retired in 1998 and drove it...
forward for our Society to create a database of 379,525 records and half a million documents, which can be accessed online by researchers through TNA’s Discovery catalogue: keywords can be entered in the search panel and results returned against the detailed summaries of the documents. We were so pleased that she could take part in the event. Very sadly Sue passed away in January 2020 and an obituary will be included in the next Transactions. She made a great contribution to the Society. Gilly’s role on the committee is no longer needed as the Navy Board project is complete. We thank her for her hard work for the Society.

News from Devonport

There are four interesting developments at or in the vicinity of Devonport.

- No. 10 Dock, built in 1907, is to be modified considerably to accommodate the refit of a new generation of nuclear submarines: see https://www.plymouthherald.co.uk/news/plymouth-news-major-devonport-dockyard-development-set-4036661DOCK. A full report will appear in our next issue.

- Many readers will be familiar with Drake’s Island off Plymouth Hoe. It has been bought by a Plymouth businessman, Morgan Phillips, who has exciting plans there for a luxury hotel and a heritage centre – see www.drakes-island.com for more details.

- Fourteen nineteenth-century ship’s figureheads have been restored by the NMRN and are on loan now to the Box, a new museum in Plymouth, where they are exhibited in the main entrance space. The figureheads were previously at the Heritage Centre in the Dockyard at Devonport but over the past two years three restoration teams have been conserving, repairing and finally repainting them. Their condition was initially assessed using a technique known as ‘sonic tomography scanning’, usually used to detect cavities in trees but here highlighting any holes of decay. Thirteen of the figureheads are suspended from the ceiling in a manner similar to that used at the museum in Karlskrona in Sweden. The largest figurehead, from Royal William, weighs two tonnes and is fourteen feet high so it is not surprising that it is positioned on the floor. The Box has yet to open due to the coronavirus but we look forward to readers’ reactions when they visit. It also features displays on the port of Plymouth so looks well worth a trip.

- The Society was very glad to hear from the Turnchapel History Group who have done extensive research on the dockyard at Turnchapel on the River Plym. Although a private yard, it built, repaired and broke up naval ships before being taken over by the Admiralty around 1900. The Group are particularly interested in information about the dockyard and ships dealt with there, before 1800. We hope to include an article on Turnchapel in our next issue but in the meantime readers can contact turnchapelpast@gmail.com with any information or thoughts that may be useful.
Proposed obliteration of Pembroke Dock’s Grade II* listed Graving Dock and the Grade II listed Timber Pond: ‘almost certainly the last such structure of its type in Wales and possibly the UK’

In October 2019, the Naval Dockyards Society was alerted to concerns about the Grade II* listed Graving Dock and the Grade II listed Timber Pond at Pembroke Dock. The Society subsequently submitted a response on 18 October 2019 to an extraordinary application by Milford Haven Port Authority to Natural Resources Wales for a ‘permit for the temporary storage of baled fuel derived from waste’, number EPR/AB1234CD.

Its Draft Decision Document Annex 1: Decision checklist stated, for Biodiversity, Heritage, Landscape and Nature Conservation (p. 36), that ‘The application is within the relevant distance criteria of a site of heritage, landscape or nature conservation, and/or protected species or habitat’ but it did not otherwise mention heritage. Its Draft Permit Document did not mention the listed structures directly affected by this project, which should have been made explicit. No heritage justification was presented for what amounts to the planned obliteration of a Grade II* listed structure and a Grade II listed structure.

It proposed to infill the Graving Dock, despite it being listed ‘Grade II* for its national importance as the best surviving dry dock in the Dockyard. Group value with other listed structures in Pembroke Dockyard.’

The Timber Pond would also be infilled, despite its Grade II listing as ‘1844 pond for preserving or “pickling” elm timber for masts.’

Jonathan Coad, a leading dockyard historian, showed that both John Rennie Sr and Jr were involved in the graving dock’s design and execution. It is the only dry dock built at Pembroke Dock, constructed in the 1820s and remodelled in the 1850s. Only the Dock and Slips 1 and 2 remain of the former twelve slips. Thus, Pembroke Dock’s already drastically curtailed shipbuilding heritage would be cut by a further third. This action would also have an impact on Slips 1 and 2.

The Society called for the permit not to be authorised, as it would cause irreversible damage to the Grade II* listed Graving Dock and Grade II listed Timber Pond, their settings and future viability. Moreover, this project would effectively remove a nationally recognised heritage value from the surviving dry dock and its group dockyard value with other listed structures, including the Pond and the Dockyard Chapel housing the Sunderland Trust Heritage Centre, which would be surrounded by waste storage. It would also threaten nearby Pembroke Dock heritage sites through environmental emissions and its visible impact.

Milford Haven Port Authority would need to apply for planning permission and listed building consent to further this project.

Pembroke Dock’s heritage is highly vulnerable due to a lack of inward capital, caused by its long economic decline since the dockyard closed in 1926 and RAF Pembroke Dock Seaplane and Flying Boat station closed in 1957, and its marginal location. In contacting other Pembroke Dock heritage sites, it became clear that some very committed groups are working hard to conserve important national, regional and local heritage with few resources.

Other news from Pembroke Dock

A significant new development is the purchase in September 2019 by a consortium, VR1844 Ltd, of the Defensible Barracks, built to house the Royal Marines defending the dockyard. The military left in the 1960s and various projects have been attempted since South Pembrokeshire Council sold the site in 1987. The aims of VR1844 Ltd to create a museum, cafe and accommodation are admirable and they plan to spend £5m on this project. However, the consortium appears to lack an understanding of the complexity and thus timeframe (‘4–5 years’) required to refurbish such a large listed site. (See Wales Online, 9 February 2020.)

Another ongoing initiative is Save the Commodore Trust (STCT), to conserve the former Captain Superintendent’s residence. In 2018 the Trust began the plan of applying to the Architectural...
Heritage Fund for a grant of up to £7,500 to undertake a viability study for the restoration and future use of The Commodore, to be match-funded by The Commodore Trust. Recently, STCT’s Chair Adrian James collated an impressive amount of data into his blog. This is extremely informative about Pembroke Dock’s history and its planning processes.

The plans put forward in the Save the Commodore Trust Project Plan are very well conceived and designed to involve the Pembroke Dock community at every stage:

- The Trust has made the necessary connections with appropriate historic organisations to obtain the best possible professional and creative advice to renovate the Captain Superintendent’s residence.
- Trust proposals will provide many education and training opportunities in historic building conservation and other professions during the renovation process.
- The Trust concept for the renovated building undertakes to provide a ‘cohesive heritage/arts tourist destination’. This would bring together the remarkable provisions of the various Pembroke Dock heritage centres to raise heritage awareness among residents and tourism organisations and provide ongoing community benefits.
- The Trust proposes varied projects whereby the renovated Captain Superintendent’s residence would tie the dockyard into the town, generate revenue, improve education and training and support sustainable marine energy projects.

The Society will monitor the progress of the permit application and supports the Save the Commodore Trust Project as the optimal way forward for both the Captain Superintendent’s residence and the Pembroke Dock community.

Dr Ann Coats

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Latest developments at Fraser Range, Portsmouth

The strangest coastal walk in Portsmouth is to continue eastwards along the Eastney coastline to the point where it meets the Langstone channel. Rows of concrete blocks are buried into the bank protecting the caravan park, but seaward of the derelict Fraser Battery the hastily put together WWII anti-tank traps have eroded to their pebble interiors. No longer lined up here, they have been sliding down the beach for many years, pulled by the tides, until some are lapped and worn away by the ceaseless waves. If you keep to the concrete wall of the battery you can see through the fence into the heavily damaged battery, with twisted metal shapes and two ranges of enigmatic broken-windowed brick buildings, guarded by teams of dogs. Behind the battery is the Grade II*-listed Fort Cumberland, the oldest fort in Portsmouth, constructed to defend the harbour entrance.

Fraser Battery was a research station, a firing range and a training base. The close relationship of Eastney and nautical gunnery dates back to 1859 when Fort Cumberland became the headquarters of the Royal Marine Artillery and a Sea Service training battery was established there. Between 1924 and 1937 the foreshore in front of the fort was used for searchlight and sound-locator training, pier-building and landing-craft development. Fraser Range was established either around this time or
shortly afterwards. It is clearly shown on aerial photographs of 1946. After 1945, it was renamed after Admiral of the Fleet, Baron Bruce Fraser of North Cape. The range, initially called Fleet Assessment Unit Fraser, specialised in training naval-gunnery personnel. It has two main ranges of buildings; the inland one was used as a laboratory. If they were not aware of its function, locals were startled by regular firings three times a week nine miles out to sea at a plane pulling a large windsock behind it.

The site had 4.5in and 4.7in Quick Firing guns as well as 40mm Bofors guns configured to simulate a shipboard-firing scenario. By the 1960s, there was also a Seacat missile-launcher for training purposes, replaced by a Sea Wolf c. 1980. The guns were mounted on the foreshore pointing seawards, requiring warning markers to be posted in the Channel to keep shipping clear of the nine-mile range. During the 1960s, Fraser was also home to HMS St George, the Royal Navy's Special Duties Officers' School, where senior ratings who had been selected for promotion were given nine months of specialist officer training. The school moved to Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth in 1974. In 1972, the base became briefly famous when it stood in for ‘HMS Seaspite’ in the Doctor Who episode The Sea Devils, starring Jon Pertwee and Katy Manning.

Fraser Gunnery Range closed in 1986, but the base was put to use again as the Civil Marine Division of the Admiralty Research Establishment (ARE), moved there from Eastney Fort East in 1989. The ARE’s work at Fraser consisted mostly of testing radar equipment using large steel-lattice towers to improve range. Missiles were fired out to sea, startling the author with a tremendous Whoosh! when she was delivering leaflets to the MOD housing to the north. In 1995 the ARE became part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, and in 2001, not being of particular strategic importance, Fraser was transferred to the privatised defence company QinetiQ, which slowly wound down operations, closing the site in 2006. Because the site was not secure, considerable vandalism and damage ensued.
QinetiQ proposed to build three oval blocks of flats, around which the winds in this very exposed location would have whistled; but a dispute with the Council over the access road prevented this development. By 2011 no progress had been made and the plans were withdrawn. Since then the site became an unofficial tourist attraction for bored children and curious visitors – and graffiti artists, some of whose work is worth preserving, according to architect Deniz Beck, who was also responsible for the transformation of Old Portsmouth’s Hot Walls and Spitbank Fort and is the architect for the latest scheme for Fraser Battery. In 2013, aware of the dangers of derelict buildings, QinetiQ had the base’s two iconic radar towers demolished to stop people from climbing them.

In 2017 the site was bought by the National Regional Property Group, based in the old Recruiting Office now Victory Gate Lodge outside the dockyard gate on the Hard, Portsea. This firm is also involved in redeveloping Fort Gilkicker and Debenham’s department store in Southsea. They propose to convert Fraser’s two 1950s main buildings into flats and to add new houses. A new coastal path along the seaward edge would incorporate new flood defences and protect the special maritime ecology.

Shaun Adams, chief executive and owner of the National Regional Property Group, said:

We fully understand the responsibilities we have to this site as developers. We have taken care in how we manage the flood defences, the coastal path, the ecology and most importantly the heritage asset of Fort Cumberland which sits behind our site. It’s taken us two-and-a-half years to get where we are today so this has been a long journey with a lot of effort and thought gone in from the team. I think these proposals will be the catalyst towards the regeneration of the wider area and I hope the investment here will increase the value of surrounding homes.

The new coastal path along the seaward edge was to incorporate new flood defences and protect the special maritime ecology. The application to convert three existing structures and construct new ones to create 108 new apartments, 26 new houses, a new sea wall for flood defence and a walkway, an access road, parking and landscaping was submitted to Portsmouth City Council in March 2019. However, this and other coastal developments in south Hampshire were held up by a European Court of Justice decision in November 2018 and other judgements. These led the government agency Natural England to recommend in May 2019 that all new build homes would have to meet strict environmental regulations over water-borne nitrate levels, because high levels of nitrogen pollution were affecting ecologically significant protected sites in the Solent Area. According to the Environment Agency new housing, as well as the major source, agriculture, contributes additional nitrogen to the water draining from the catchment area, causing excessive growth of green algae. There is uncertainty as to whether new growth will further deteriorate designated coastal waters. The potential for future housing developments across the Solent region to exacerbate these impacts created a risk to their potential future conservation status.

The Solent water environment is internationally important for its wildlife and is protected under the Water Environment Regulations and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations as well as national protection for many parts of the coastline and their sea. There are high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus input to this water environment with sound evidence that these nutrients are causing eutrophication [plant growth] at these designated sites.

Despite the many thousands in need of new homes and the government’s pressure to meet housing targets, local authorities including Portsmouth temporarily ceased giving planning permission while they looked for ways to enable development to take place while ensuring that the water quality in the Solent’s internationally protected sites was preserved. Delays in getting planning permission lead to an absence of new housing for the thousands of people on waiting lists, developers losing money, contributing to high house prices and contractors (and potentially planners) losing work. In August 2019 Portsmouth Director of Regeneration proposed a ‘nitrate neutrality’ mitigation strategy to enable both city and private development proposals. This was intended to meet the tests of Habitat Regulations and avert the potential risk of legal challenge. The Partnership of South Hampshire (PUSH) worked towards a sub-regional long-term strategy to address the problem with central government agencies.
In December 2019, having agreed a new strategy to reduce nitrate output from new development by offsetting water-saving measures in the council’s existing housing stock, Portsmouth City Council again began granting planning permission for new housing developments. They were also considering introducing oyster beds because they feed on harmful algae and store nitrogen in their shells and tissue. Havant Borough Council proposed to install reed beds to filter runoff, but both these authorities’ measures can of course only be temporary. Fareham’s housing stock was already said to be water-efficient. In early 2020 PUSH, working with the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the Environment Agency, hoped to buy areas of farmland that contribute large amounts of nitrogen through the use of fertilisers, to green it by planting trees, plants and introducing animals. Their problem was how to find the money to buy the land.

In July 2019, Historic England said the development would cause harm to the ravelin and western ramparts and to the fort’s southern defences because of the proposed coastal defence scheme – where there may be as yet unidentified archaeology. This harm could be mitigated through careful design of the block plans and landscaping of residential properties. They said that although the Fraser buildings interrupt the fort’s sightlines, fields of fire (originally 360 degrees via its star-shape), and its connectivity with the sea, ‘the stark industrial character’ of the Fraser Battery buildings ‘is not entirely out of keeping with the earlier military defences represented by the scheduled monument, and their current dereliction adds a circumstantial but evocative backdrop when experiencing the isolation of the Fort and its southern-most defences.’ They asked for a conservation management plan to identify archaeological recording and conservation works and provision for future maintenance of the heritage resource as well as opportunities for better interpretation and public access.

SAVE Britain’s Heritage objected to removal of the blocks, but Historic England (whose Centre for Archaeology is in the adjacent Fort Cumberland) said moving and reinstating them would be ‘less than substantial harm’. In March 2020 the Naval Dockyards Society agreed with Historic England that the proposal would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of Fort Cumberland and that a topographical survey and an archaeological management plan to protect and manage below-ground archaeology should be carried out. The battery’s history and archaeological features should be integrated into the development’s design and interpretation. As other objectors said, it should also address the community need for affordable housing.

Dr Celia Clark
The Admiralty House at Sheerness

Admiralty House, the most prestigious residential building to have stood within the royal naval shore establishment at Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey, was built in accordance with an order of 31 May 1827, with its construction proceeding without delay. The three-storey mansion, which was situated just outside the dockyard wall near Garrison Point, was to form the official residence of the senior naval officer at Sheerness, at that time the Commander-in-Chief, the Nore. By the end of the year, the main structural work was almost completed, the Maidstone Gazette of 25 December 1827 reporting: ‘The workmen are making the most rapid progress with the Admiralty House; the roof is on and there is no doubt of its being ready for the Admiral’s reception in the ensuing summer.’

The architect for the House was George Ledwell Taylor, Civil Architect to the Admiralty, whose elegant Commissioner’s House, church and two terraces of officers’ houses at the eastern end of the dockyard were built during the same period.

Admiralty House presented an imposing example of the Greek Revival style of architecture. Entering the building through a large porch, visitors proceeded up some wide stone steps into the
spacious entrance hallway, which was finely decorated and contained two handsome Ionic columns. To the back of the hallway, the elegant principal stairway led up to the first-floor landing on which four Graeco-Egyptian pillars formed a noticeable feature. On this level were situated, linked by double doors, two state rooms with ceilings displaying tasteful plasterwork and with high quality marble fireplaces. On the same floor were also the bedrooms for the residents and their guests. The landing and stairs were lit by natural light through a glass dome in the roof. On the ground floor was placed a capacious dining room able to hold banquets for fifty or more, the food being prepared in the basement below, which housed a substantial kitchen with large cooking ranges. On the top floor was contained the living quarters for the servants.

It was hoped locally that Admiralty House might become the official residence of the Duke of Clarence, third son of George III, who, in the spring of 1827, had been created Lord High Admiral. Clarence, a career sailor, had taken great interest in Sheerness Dockyard since its massive rebuilding had been put underway. He was guest of honour at the official opening of the new works and was highly popular in the town. The *Evening Standard* of 13 May 1828 stated:

At Sheerness today the Lord High Admiral, the Duke of Clarence, inspected the Dockyard and received a deputation asking for the name of Sheerness to be changed to Port Clarence. The Duke said he gratefully appreciated the compliment to him and his august family. He had however, no power to change the name but would lend his influence in furtherance of the object.

In the end, the name of Sheerness would not be changed, the matter having been referred to Sir Robert Peel, Home Secretary, who stated that such a move ‘would obliterate the historic associations connected with the name of Sheerness.’ Hopes that the Duke of Clarence might occupy Admiralty House were also to be dashed. In June 1830 King George IV died and it was Clarence, by then his eldest surviving brother, who succeeded to the throne as William IV. Clarence was not to be forgotten at Sheerness, however, and in Admiralty House there was placed on the landing of the main stairway a full-length portrait of His Majesty, resplendent in the full uniform of a British admiral.

As had originally been intended, Admiralty House became the official residence of the highest-ranking officer of the Nore Command. The first to take up occupancy was Vice-Admiral Sir Henry Blackwood, Bart., who had been appointed Commander-in-Chief at the Nore in 1827. Next, from 1830, came Vice-Admiral Sir John Beresford, Bart. On 5 July 1833, he received as an overnight guest Sir Robert Peel, Home Secretary, who had arrived to explain plans he had to supersede the rounders and watchmen responsible for the dockyard’s security by a division of the recently formed Metropolitan Police Force. The proposed change was enacted a month later, on 5 August. By this time Beresford had departed from Admiralty House having, on 23 July 1833, been replaced by Vice-Admiral Sir Richard King, Bart.

On 5 August 1834 Vice-Admiral King died at the house, having fallen victim to a cholera outbreak in Sheerness, and was buried on Sheppey in Eastchurch church. Among the succeeding admirals to occupy Admiralty House would be others similarly fated to die in residence.

Vice-Admiral Sir Edward Brace was appointed to the Nore in 1841 and took up residence in the house. There he would die at three o’clock in the morning of 26 December 1843, having suffered a stroke the previous night. Soon after he had retired for the night, his family had been surprised by him ringing his bedroom bell and, investigating, discovered the attack. He would never speak again. A messenger had been quickly dispatched from Admiralty House to London to secure the expertise of a top physician who upon arrival could only pronounce that Sir Edward was beyond recovery. On 2 January, the body of the late admiral was embarked on board the *Myrtle*, a steam vessel, to be conveyed for interment in his family vault near Portsmouth. With all flags at half-mast, the mournful procession left Admiralty House at 10.30 a.m., the officers in full dress uniform and the hats of the seamen trimmed with black crepe. The route of the procession to the Ordnance Wharf was lined with men of the 77th Regiment. A drizzle completed the melancholy atmosphere of the event. As the cortège progressed the minute guns were fired on the *Camperdown* and firing repeated as the admiral’s flag was displayed half-mast from the *Myrtle*, before she carried him away on his final sea voyage.

Vice-Admiral John C. White, who was appointed in January 1844 as the replacement for Vice-Admiral Brace, must have looked forward to enjoying a happier residency at Admiralty House than
his predecessor. Unfortunately, it was not to be. Although having complained for several days previously of not feeling well, by 4 April 1845 he was sufficiently recovered to have a party to dinner with him. The next day, however, about eleven o'clock in the morning while signing some official papers, he was suddenly seized with a sharp return of a pain in the chest, and died almost immediately. The cause of his death was attributed to ‘a disease of the heart’.

Given Admiralty House’s growing reputation as a portal to the afterlife, it might be wondered what fate befell its next occupant, Vice-Admiral Sir Edward D. King. Happy to relate he completed his period of office without fatal consequence in 1848.

Notwithstanding this, the grim reaper had one more call at Admiralty House before the century was out. Vice-Admiral Charles T. Curme became CinC the Nore in August 1890. Initially Admiralty House was undergoing some major refurbishment, as the Sheerness Times reported on 18 October 1890: ‘The repairs to the house having been completed, Vice-Admiral and Mrs Curme, who have been living on the Northampton, have taken up their residence there.’

Curme was to be allowed a few months to enjoy his new home but eventually on 18 February 1892, the fatal day arrived. At about 4 p.m., he was sitting in a chair in his room when, with no warning, he had a seizure and was carried off to his bed. The next morning, though still conscious, his condition had become exceedingly critical and his lower limbs were paralysed. An urgent telegram was sent off to London to summon an eminent physician, Dr Broadbent, who arrived only to learn that a few moments earlier the stricken admiral had breathed his last.

The history of Admiralty House was not to be just one of doom and gloom, it would also become one of boom! Garrison Point Fort, built close by Admiralty House, was completed and became operational in 1877. The mansion was soon engendering some serious discussions about serious concussions. A writer in York House Papers on 31 March 1880, when Vice-Admiral Sir Reginald Macdonald was in occupation, reported:

I do not envy the gallant and popular Admiral who commands at the Nore. Within fifty yards of his residence, the Admiralty House in the Dockyard, is the principal battery for the defence of the Medway, armed with 12-ton guns. From these guns firing practice goes on, which has increased in the last few days – the volunteer artillery having taken charge of the fort. But what is both objectionable, dangerous and wasteful is the smashing of windows, and the bringing down of ceilings of the Admiral’s house, which has just been put through repair at considerable cost. The fact is the proximity of the fort, when practice is going on, simply renders the House uninhabitable from the effects of concussion, and Lady Macdonald and family are unable to go into it. What is the remedy? Either to build the Commander-in Chief at the Nore a new house away from the fort, or cease the practice of the 12-ton guns. As the latter is not imperative, perhaps to “cease firing” is the easiest remedy.
Since issues of national security had priority over matters of personal comfort, even of an admiral and his family, the periodic test and practice firing of the guns continued. To counteract the effects of the concussion, various means were tried, perhaps the most effectual being a large canvas screen, some ten to twelve feet in height, extending the whole of the side of Admiralty House facing the fortress. This warded off some of the effects of the concussion. The official part of the house, the offices of the admiral and his staff, suffered most from the firing.

The problem became exacerbated following the installation of some huge 25-ton pieces of ordnance in the fort, as recorded in the Sheerness Guardian of 20 April 1895.

The firing of the 25 ton muzzle loading guns . . . by the City of London Artillery Volunteers, who occupied the stronghold during Eastertide, has resulted in the destruction of a large number of panes of glass in Admiralty House . . . two or three window sashes were also blown out, while the wall in one of the offices was damaged. The effects of the firing were more severely felt than usual on account of the direction of the wind.

There was a sunnier side to the story of Admiralty House. From the outset it became known as the place for holding sumptuous balls and banquets, and as the venue for plays, concerts and other soirées. These were all organised for the entertainment of visiting notables, naval and military officers stationed at Sheerness and their families as well as a few of the most favoured prominent townsmen.

The use of the house for hosting lavish gatherings would reach a peak in 1902, the year of the coronation of Edward VII. In one week in July, there were three separate major dinners, accompanied by dances. These arose due to the number of foreign ships in harbour. Japanese ships included the Asama, an armoured cruiser carrying the flag of Rear Admiral Ijuin, and there was also the US battleship Illinois (Rear Admiral Crowninshield).

The last CinC of the Nore to live in Admiralty House was Admiral Sir Hugo L. Pearson, who vacated it at the end of December 1906, it having been decided that the headquarters of the Nore Command should be relocated to Chatham. Admiralty House was to become the official residence of a more senior naval officer as the Times of 27 March 1907 reported:

Vice-Admiral F.C.B. Bridgeman, Commander in Chief of the Home Fleet, arrived yesterday at Sheerness on an unofficial visit to Admiralty House, which is being prepared for occupation as his official residence. The office accommodation at the house for the staff of the Home Fleet is being enlarged.

The last flag officer to occupy Admiralty House was Admiral Cecil Burney. It then closed for some time, but during the First World War was reopened as the headquarters of the Wrens (Women's Royal Naval Service). On 27 November 1914 Admiralty House provided the venue for the Court of Inquiry into the loss of the battleship HMS Bulwark, which had blown up nearby the previous day. The massive detonation was attributed to accidental internal explosion. No one who sat on the board on that sombre occasion could have imagined that just six months later another ship, the minelayer Princess Irene, would also blow up in Sheerness harbour due to accidental internal explosion, with 276 naval personnel and 76 dockyard workers lost.

After the Wrens were demobilised, Admiralty House was again closed and only reopened on one single short occasion in the next fifteen years, when utilised for a Fleet dance. In 1934, the Admiralty lent Admiralty House to the Air Ministry to be the residence of Air Commodore Arthur Pattinson DSO MC DFC, the new commanding officer at Eastchurch Air Station. Extensive decoration and repairs were carried out in anticipation of this.

During the Second World War, Admiralty House became home to the administration offices for HMS Wildfire, the minesweeper base at Queenborough Pier and the dockyard. In the grounds HMS Vector was established, a training school for radar operators and technicians.

With the return to peace, Admiralty House was again left vacant, and was handed over to the War Department for army use in the 1950s, its final use being as an officers‘ mess for the RASC Water Transport Section. The army decommissioned the barracks and its facilities at Sheerness in 1958. When the dockyard was closed on 31 March 1960, the former garrison and its buildings, including Admiralty House, passed into the hands of a private company which had acquired the former yard as a commercial enterprise. Within a couple of years, Admiralty House had been included in a
redevelopment programme, incorporating destruction of several substantial Georgian-era buildings at the western end of the dockyard and garrison. Subsequent demolition of this historic mansion was commenced in January 1964; the firm of contractors employed to pull down Admiralty House bore the somewhat inappropriate name Marine Repairing Co. Ltd.

David T Hughes

A Visit to Rostock . . . with footnote in Berlin

Recently, I visited Rostock in eastern Germany, primarily to give a paper at a conference in the university there. However, there was also ample time to explore a city with deep maritime and naval roots; once one of the principal centres of the Hanseatic League, it was one of the main bases of the East German navy during the Cold War and now contains the headquarters of the German navy.

Standing on the estuary of the River Warnow, the town of Rostock existed by the twelfth century and joined the Hanseatic League in 1259, when it had a fleet of some one hundred ships trading as far east as Novgorod and as far west as Britain. In 1323 it obtained the village of Warnemunde, at the mouth of the estuary, thus gaining full control of the waterway. Its university, established in 1419, is the oldest in northern Europe (the 600th anniversary being one reason for staging the conference I attended). Despite fires, notably a great blaze in 1677, and heavy Allied bombing in the Second World War, significant amounts of medieval heritage survive, including extensive stretches of the city walls, four of the original nine gates, the thirteenth-century Convent of the Holy Cross (now the culture museum) and three churches,

The Steintor gate of Rostock, built between 1574 and 1577.
including the greatest, Saint Marien. This somehow survived the heaviest Bomber Command raids of all, a four-day blitz in April 1942. Rostock was targeted because it was home to both the Heinkel and Arado aircraft works, and had a relatively safe and easy approach directly over the Baltic; indeed, until 1944 it was the worst damaged city in Germany. Today, Rostock has some brutalist architecture from the Communist era, but overall, the feel of it is strongly Scandinavian, a connection enhanced by its regular ferry services to Trelleborg (Sweden) and Gedser (Denmark). One bizarre feature is the fountain in the main square, which can best be described as containing sculptures of naked male and female figures performing various contortions; it’s officially called the Fountain of Joy, but the locals nickname it ‘the porno fountain’.

The naval base is at Hohe Dune, a long, low spit of land which stretches across the eastern side of the harbour mouth. It was originally established in 1913 as a naval seaplane base; during the 1920s, when Germany was forbidden to have military aircraft, it operated as a covert training facility nominally owned by a private company. The Nazis overturned this policy in 1935, when Hohe Dune again became a fully-fledged naval aviation base, and in 1940 it was the principal assembly point for the amphibious forces sent to invade Denmark. The existing facilities were blown up by the Soviets in 1946–7, but in 1956 it became Naval Base West of the newly formed East German navy, with new shore facilities being built to support a flotilla consisting primarily of minesweepers and anti-submarine vessels. It continued to support the so-called People’s Navy until 4 October 1990 when the East German flag was hauled down for the last time, with the base being taken over by the Soviet Navy the following day. Throughout the Communist era, Rostock’s commercial port was East Germany’s principal harbour, and it also housed one of the principal shipbuilding facilities for the entire Eastern bloc. Since a major reorganisation in 2012, the base on Hohe Dune has been home to the Navy Command and the office of the Inspector of the Navy, roughly equivalent to the First Sea Lord. It is the home port of the First Corvette Squadron, consisting of five Braunschweig-class ships,* and the squadron’s tender, the supply ship Donau; when I took my harbour cruise, the

* Apparently, the German Navy got itself into an almighty semantic tangle with this class; traditionally, a warship could only be a ‘ship’ if it had an executive officer, which would have meant classifying these powerful corvettes as ‘boats’, so a special dispensation had to be agreed.
latter was alongside together with the corvettes *Oldenburg* and *Magdeburg* and some smaller craft. Most of the German navy’s larger ships are based at Wilhelmshaven, the submarines at Eckernförde.

In terms of size, the facilities at Hohe Dune are relatively insignificant, consisting primarily of low post-war buildings. (Plans showing the development of the base, and the nature of the buildings it contains, can be found online.) They can only be seen from a distance on the harbour tour; the natural basin which contains the naval base is partly divided from the Warnow estuary itself by a small islet, and the cruise boats stay in the main channel. The naval facilities are overshadowed, both literally and metaphorically, by the vast structures directly across the Warnow estuary, the ship halls of the Neptun Werft shipyard. Dating back to 1850, this has always been one of Germany’s principal shipbuilding yards, producing Type VII U-boats during the Second World War. Today it concentrates on cruise ship construction, and one of these astonishing structures – I hesitate to say ‘vessels’, because at the moment there’s virtually nothing ‘shipshape’ about it – was on the stocks when I took my harbour cruise. This will eventually become a *Global*-class cruise ship with 2,500 cabins, capable of carrying 5,000 passengers and intended primarily for the rapidly growing Chinese market.

The harbour cruise boat turns around at Warnemunde (itself a regular port of call for large cruise ships), where the River Warnow empties into the Baltic, but there was one final surprise just as it did so, lying alongside a quay across the river from the naval base – Greenpeace’s *Rainbow Warrior*, successor to the ship infamously blown up by the French Secret Service. Its presence might have accounted in part for the huge turnout in the climate-change protest march which I witnessed in the centre of Rostock later the same day.

All in all, a visit to Rostock, and especially the harbour tour, is highly recommended to NDS members who ever find themselves in that part of the world.

My trip also allowed me some time in Berlin, and I used some of it to visit the Technik Museum, which is well off the main tourist track. My specific reason for doing so was that I’d become aware of an exhibition being held there entitled *Architectura Navalis – Floating Baroque*. As it turned out, the exhibition is small and fairly disappointing – some excellent drawings of eighteenth-century French warship decoration, but only two ship models and nothing else – but the rest of the museum was a revelation. Its shipping section, spread over two floors, is very extensive and contains some excellent ship models, along with extensive displays about shipbuilding, navigation, exploration, and so forth. For those with an interest in aviation, there are also vintage aircraft of all shapes and sizes, and an especially impressive display about the Berlin airlift (indeed, the museum’s most obvious external feature is a DC3 Dakota actually suspended from the wall!). All in all, it’s well worth a detour if you’re visiting Berlin.

**David Davies**

**Reference**


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**Naval Hospital Mahon Minorca – an update**

In our last issue, we featured a report on the very successful project to restore the Naval Hospital on the Isla del Rey in Mahon harbour. An art gallery is also being created on Isla del Rey by Hauser & Wirth – more details online. Coincidentally, as the last *Dockyards* went to press, I was fortunate to go on a most interesting boat trip around Mahon harbour and alight near the end at the Isla del Rey. We were given a very good tour by an enthusiastic guide. The Hospital has been brought back to life from virtual dereliction and interesting exhibits are displayed in the rooms on the ground floor. The upper floor awaits restoration. A visit is highly recommended and the volunteers on the project have achieved wonders. Beverly Ward wrote the report in the last issue and updated us in late February on developments.

Isla del Rey is progressing well on all fronts. The British and French history rooms on the first floor of the Interpretation Center are practically completed and the Hauser & Wirth building should be
completed ‘almost’ on time by the end of April. However, while awaiting public announcements from the art gallery, it seems likely they will open late spring as planned but probably the first big exhibition will be next year.

We have also finished a laboratory room in the main building and are preparing a room on ophthalmology amongst other things. We keep going and doing as much as our funds allow.

The spring will be a changing point for us and the guided tours will be getting busy once we have the catamaran transport from Mahon in April. If anyone is planning to come over to visit they can find out times and days of transport by contacting us here: https://www.yellowcatamarans.com/es/inicio.

Richard Holme

References
1 https://www.hauserwirth.com/locations/25040-menorca
2 http://www.islahospitalmenorca.org/en/

Meet the Committee: John Day – Royal Dockyards Oral History Project Co-ordinator

I left school at fifteen in the summer of 1968 to become a craft electrical fitter apprentice at Devonport Dockyard. The following year saw transfer to the technical apprenticeship scheme in the mechanical engineering specialisation and I then moved to the drawing office as a draughtsman in August 1973. During the next twelve years several roles were performed with substantive promotion to PTO 3 and acting promotion to PTO 2. Design work on large ships; work measurement as an estimator of work in the main factory, and method study of shipboard techniques so both aspects of Work Study methodology covered; project management and the introduction of computer management systems to aid nuclear submarine refits. In February 1986 I left Devonport, and dockyards, on promotion to another part of the MoD at AWRE Aldermaston. The next four years saw work in system analysis and computer programming followed by planning and procurement work. An opportunity for promotion and to manage computer systems occurred at RAE Farnborough in 1990. The next fifteen years involved work at various MoD research establishments. This included computer system management, introducing total quality programmes, project management, operational analysis and business management process design and implementation. Early retirement was taken in September 2005 after being Head of Information System on the formation of Dstl (Defence Science and Technology Laboratory) in July 2001 and latterly becoming the organisation’s Chief Information Officer.

When one writes a CV or, as in this case, a career overview it looks as if there is a plan in place rather than as it was for me a series of jobs I enjoyed with changes of location being encouraged by events. The only constant was being employed by the Ministry of Defence. The MoD trained
me for many roles and either directly or indirectly paid for my technical education, but it was my family that set me on the course of fascination with history, politics, defence, logistics, technology and how organisations and things work. The Royal Dockyards, in public ownership, presented an environment that has touched all these elements with the added factor of being present for all but fourteen months of its last nineteen years as a government-run organisation. A theme develops as privatisation of Aldermaston was announced in 1989 with my move in early 1990 followed by my retention in government service at Dstl two days before being moved to QinetiQ in 2001.

My link with Britain’s Admiralty, Royal Navy and the Royal Dockyards was made before I was born. My grandfathers had been in the Royal Navy, my father an engineering fitter and turner apprentice in a Plymouth trawler company until becoming an artificer, ‘Tiffy’, in the Royal Navy during the Second World War. After the war my parents returned to Plymouth with Dad joining the dockyard until the early 1950s when the Admiralty took our family to Durban, South Africa. This reunited my father with a location where his ship refitted and a country that intrigued him. I was born at this outpost of the Admiralty in June 1953. We returned to Plymouth with Dad returning to Devonport Dockyard until 1981 when he retired. He was joined by my elder brother as a shipwright apprentice in 1961, myself in 1968 and my younger brother in 1975 as an engine fitter apprentice. Many of my memories at mealtimes are of my dad and brother discussing their respective jobs and challenges. Conversations between my parents and their friends frequently discussed their ‘wars’ and their jobs. I just listened and asked questions. My father had an interest in engineering, and what was to become known as system engineering, with an appreciation of logistics having seen, and been impressed by, US Navy practice. Explanations of Admiralty 3 Drum boiler, steam turbines, hydraulics and how ships were operated, built and repaired seem to have been interspersed with games and sport. The rest of the time was occupied with anything we could find to read.

Choosing to work in Devonport Dockyard is not surprising given this background. However, if one includes an opportunity to obtain a craft skill, be paid and given a technical education with training that was difficult to beat then joining the dockyard made sense. The enjoyment of working in the dockyard, the people encountered, the problems faced and solved increased my interest in engineering, technology and how organisations functioned.

On retiring in my early fifties I decided to formalise my knowledge of Britain’s naval past by going back to university. My dockyard career had given me a Higher National Certificate in mechanical engineering and that seemed sufficient as the vast majority of the higher management were without degrees. When I joined the MoD’s research establishments I found myself surrounded by scientists, all with degrees. They didn’t seem any cleverer than the people I left. This encouraged me to obtain my bachelor’s science degree from the Open University. I originally undertook my history master’s degree at Exeter University to understand the subject and develop a formalised knowledge of Britain’s navy. This was a taught course that covered the British navy in all aspects i.e., strategic, tactical, organisational, social and political from 1660 to 1945. As my lecturers and supervisors were Mike Duffy, Roger Morriss and Nicholas Rodger I had drawn first prize for an understanding of naval history. I enjoyed the experience so much I went on to complete a Ph.D. in maritime history at Exeter. I scrutinised Britain’s dockyards and logistics in the sailing ship era with my thesis examining Britain’s expansion of naval power into the Indian Ocean and the part played by her naval bases. I found the cliché ‘of taking the boy out of the dockyards didn’t take the dockyards out of the boy’ to be true.

The image shows me on Graham Land, a part of Antarctic named after the First Lord of the Admiralty who abolished the Navy Board in 1832!

John Day
In early 1950 the United Kingdom announced that Bermuda Dockyard would close within one year. This decision had a dramatic effect on the lives of both the families and personnel who were to be repatriated to the UK and on the well-being of the people of Bermuda.

The surprise decision to evacuate all personnel and their families was announced in January 1950 and by September of that year the dockyard, its facilities and family homes were vacated. The Bermuda Dockyard was a unique Admiralty facility. Dockyard architectural historian Jonathan Coad described it in January 2016:

The 1909 plan of the dockyard shows a quite extraordinary amount of housing outside the yard for the workforce. . . . It would seem that workers’ housing was provided only in very limited circumstances and only survives today at Haulbowline and at Bermuda.

The dockyard, its township, residences, and facilities were abandoned within nine months of the announcement. Repatriation to the United Kingdom involved 178 service personnel, 1,124 civilians and 570 family members. (A few stayed behind to supervise the closure of buildings and to prepare Admiralty Floating Dock 5 for the long tow to Falmouth in 1951.) Many families had lived on the Islands since the mid-1930s and their children had never known life in the UK. The closure and repatriation had dramatic and often traumatic consequences for many families and individuals.
The effects on the local population were even more dramatic. Some 500 Bermudians were no longer employed in HM Dockyard and the many businesses that supplied the dockyard were left without an income or a market. The population of Bermuda in 1950 was about 37,000 and the closure of the dockyard had a massive impact on the economy.

Commencing in this the 70th Anniversary year a group of the former residents, their families and friends are now creating a record of this historic event and invite anyone with a story or with information from this period and specifically of the dockyard closure to add to the record on Facebook (‘Bermuda Dockyard. Family life on the island 1936 to 1952’) or by email to roger.bendall@gmail.com. The group is indebted to the Naval Dockyards Society and the National Museum of Bermuda for their assistance, to Brian Hyde, Roger Bendall and Alexander Birt and to all the others who have already contributed to the project.

The motivation for this project came after a visit to the National Museum of Bermuda in 2016. There was a recognition that, although there were exhibits devoted to the Royal Navy, the Air Force, Army, the Portuguese, slaves, etc., there was no record of the day-to-day lives of the dockyard families who lived on Ireland Island and Boaz, many of whom still consider it to be their place of birth and ‘home’. It was as if the community hadn’t existed. Also absent was any record of the economic
and community impact of the dockyard closure on the wider Bermuda population and the workforce that was dependent upon it.

The story we wish to record is that of everyday life on the islands during the period 1936 to 1952 and, in doing so, to create a permanent record of this unique society in book and exhibition form. My own story serves as an example of the history we are recording.

My brother David and I were born in Bermuda, David in 1940 and myself in 1943. We left Bermuda in 1947, travelling to the UK, with our mother Freda for three months’ holiday. We left Bermuda again and finally in 1950.

Our father Alfred William (Bill) Bendall was posted to Bermuda as a shipwright in 1936 and my mother joined him there in 1937. My uncle, Gordon Grant, was posted to Bermuda in 1941 returning to the UK in 1944. My brother and I have a library of photographs of the dockyard, its personnel and family life in the dockyard community including those of our childhood growing up in Albert Row. My cousin, Ian Grant, son of Gordon has found some three hundred letters sent by Gordon to his future wife in London during the war many of which describe life in Bermuda Dockyard community at that time.

My father and mother returned to an England they hardly knew after a thirteen-year absence and a community with whom they had little shared experience; my brother and I came to a country that was not our home. This sense of dislocation was shared with many and it forms a part of our story.

Roger Bendall

Farewell to MV Georgic from families left behind.

Reference
1 https://www.facebook.com/groups/408892213001927/

Blue Plaque for a Naval Physician

Chichester was once the home of Sir William Burnett, Physician-General to the Navy between 1832 and 1855, living in East Pallant House, now owned by Chichester District Council. It was in East Pallant House that Burnett died in 1861, buried in nearby Boxgrove Abbey. To mark his connection with East Pallant House, and through the efforts of former NDS committee member, Dr Philip MacDougall, and working alongside the City Council, a blue plaque is soon to be placed on the building, naming Burnett as a former resident.

William Burnett was one of the nation’s great naval heroes. Present at a number of naval battles, he served under John Jervis at the Battle of Cape St Vincent (1797) and the assault on Cadiz (1797), while under Nelson he was present at Abū Qīr Bay (1798) and Trafalgar (1805). In all these battles, his task was that of preserving life. Every day he mixed with those who were suffering from battle wounds or highly contagious diseases, his own health constantly endangered. Towards the end of 1813, one of the worst winters of the Little Ice Age, and still recovering from a period of ill-health, Burnett was appointed to the Medway naval anchorage at Chatham, where a typhoid epidemic had broken out. Crowded onto old and dilapidated warships – known as hulks – were thousands of French, Danish and American prisoners together with several thousand more seamen of an
allied Russian fleet over-wintering in the Medway. Upon first inspecting three hulks that had been set aside as hospital ships, Burnett found them to be in a most unsanitary state, reporting on the condition of the patients and indicating that he found ‘fifteen with their lower extremities more or less in a state of gangrene and almost every patient covered with bed sores’. This partly explains the low survival rate, with 28% of those who contracted the disease failing to recover. Following Burnett’s arrival and insistence upon proper nursing, survival rate jumped to a seemingly miraculous 89%. To achieve this, Burnett had chosen to ignore all risk to himself, entering the hospital ships on the Medway to seek out those in need. Aware of his ability and dedication the Russian admiral requested that upon his fleet sailing for St Petersburg, Burnett go with them as senior surgeon. It was upon his return from St Petersburg that Burnett first settled in Chichester, taking up residence while serving as physician to the general dispensary (the future Royal West Sussex Hospital). A frequent visitor to Goodwood House, he was under the patronage of the 5th Duke, this assisting his climbing the ladder of promotion, invited in 1822 to join the Navy’s Victualling Board (then also responsible for naval medical matters), followed by a later appointment to the post of Physician-General to the Navy and shortly after physician-in-ordinary to William IV. Other important achievements were ensuring that Chatham got its first permanent naval hospital, Melville Hospital, which was located opposite the main gate of Chatham Dockyard, and at Haslar bringing about a more humane regime for naval seamen suffering mental illnesses, abolishing the policy of strapping them to beds rather than giving them freedom to walk around.

Philip MacDougall
Childhood Memories of Sheerness Dockyard

The Royal Navy’s dockyards have been studied, analysed and written about for many years, addressing the shipbuilding and repairing activities, victualling, the architecture and engineering, and the workforce. But what was it like to live in one as a youngster?

I was very pleased to see Richard Holme’s article in the May 2019 Dockyards about the Boatswain’s House in Sheerness Dockyard, as it brought back so many childhood memories. Following dockyard appointments in Hong Kong and Devonport, my father was appointed Chief Engineer of the Dockyard in October 1955 and remained in post until October 1959, shortly before the yard closed. I was at boarding school at this time, so got to know the dockyard during my holidays.

Having been taken into Hong Kong and Devonport dockyards during earlier appointments, my first impression of Sheerness Dockyard was that it was different, that it did not feel like a Naval Dockyard. Passing the garrison guardhouse I could see the Dockyard Church and Naval Terrace, and entering the Dockyard Main Gate, the view was of the Captain Superintendent’s House with a rough paddock opposite, and further on a large ‘playing field’ with a line of mature elms down the middle, opposite my new home. The house was in an elegant Georgian terrace, with a basement that still had the high-tide mark of the 1953 east coast floods, a large and lovely garden with the stables at the bottom facing the dockyard wall, which separated us from St Paul’s Church and Naval Terrace.

The house came with two staff, a full-time housekeeper (‘I’ll ‘ave to go ‘ome, madam, I’ve forgotten me teeth’), and a part-time gardener, who was a retired dockyard worker. Domestic rubbish was collected by horse and cart – the yard had its own stables, which accommodated three horses, whose main task seemed to be rubbish and scrap collection for the whole yard. The house was bitterly cold during the winter and very expensive to centrally heat, even on a captain’s salary, so until supplies ran out we kept warm around an open fire fuelled by blocks impregnated with tar. These had been used for the flooring of the yard’s workshops until they floated off in the 1953 floods and were never relaid. They were, of course, delivered by horse and cart.

Opposite the house was the dockyard’s manual telephone exchange and informal call-answering service. Callers to our home might get responses such as ‘They have just gone out in the car with a picnic, so I should call again this evening’ or ‘I have just seen Mrs Blanchford go round to No. 1, so I’ll put you though there’. The exchange was next to the Dockyard Clinic – a very useful facility for being patched up after minor injuries incurred while playing on the grass in front of our house.

Above: Captain Superintendent’s House c.1958.

Right: 3 Dockyard Terrace, where the author lived 1955–8.
One of the Captain Superintendent’s duties, no doubt carried out by his ‘boat’s crew’, was to feed the geese that lived in the paddock. They were the dockyard’s intruder alarm, and after the main gates had been closed at about 10 p.m., anyone entering the yard through the side gate, or through the gate behind the church, would be greeted by a furious cackling. I do not recall ever seeing the horses in the paddock, even though their stables were next to it.

For two brothers brought up in a naval family, Sheerness Dockyard was a wonderful place to explore. During the day the main working area of the dockyard, beyond the Archway Block, was out of bounds without special permission, but there was rarely anyone about after hours so we had free rein. I’m sure we weren’t supposed to, but we explored the ships under refit, literally from top to bottom, bridge to engine room, and from stem to stern, both inside and out for those in dry dock.

The three main classes of ship refitted in Sheerness Dockyard at this time were the *Algerine* and *Ton*-class minesweepers and the *Loch*-class frigates.

However, that special permission was not hard to get if something interesting was happening, like the docking or undocking of ships from the Great Basin. Unlike many basins in other yards, this exercise was dependent on the tide as there was only a single caisson. Manoeuvring the larger ships in the basin was an interesting operation, using warps and an occasional nudge from a motor cutter. Once the ship was clear of the entrance a diver, wearing a copper helmet suit and supplied with air by two men on an ‘organ grinder’ air pump, was sent down to check that there was no debris fouling the seating of the caisson. Docking and undocking in the floating dock moored off the Cornwallis jetty was another source of fascination.

Boat trips were another diversion. Aboard the tug *Jaunty*, we occasionally escorted ships upriver to Chatham for refit, meeting them in the estuary near the Red Sands fort, sometimes chasing them upriver at our maximum speed of twelve knots and watching them steadily draw ahead until we lost sight of them round the bends in the Medway. We also joined the RASC launch on a visit to the Red Sands forts. I cannot recall the purpose of the visit, but the forts were manned on a care and maintenance basis until 1956, so it could have been a resupply visit. Sadly we were not allowed to climb the access ladders, so never saw the inside of the forts.

The social life of the resident community in the dockyard was very much on a ‘do it yourself’ basis. For a time there was a Scottish county dance club led by the Commander of the Dockyard until he was posted elsewhere, and there were regular canasta evenings. For the adults there was a regular round of cocktail parties, which did not bother us until our parents were the hosts and we were required to dress smartly, smile sweetly and pass round the canapés. Our least favourite evening activity.

I have very pleasant memories of living in the dockyard as a young teenager, the beautiful smell of the wood store, wandering through a deserted after-hours dockyard, watching the traffic on the Medway, sunset over the oil refinery. I am saddened to see the loss and neglect of such wonderful historic buildings following its closure, but I am very pleased to see that the Dockyard Church will be restored with a £4.1m grant from the Lottery Heritage Fund, and that the wonderful dockyard model, which I first saw in (I think) the Quadrangular Store House, will be ‘coming home’.

*Nigel Blanchford*
A South American Odyssey

These are testing times for cruise ships, as you may have noticed from some of the media reports of passengers stuck in quarantine on ships, and similar horror stories. My wife Andrea and I got caught up in one of these situations, though thankfully it was not a particularly bad experience. We were booked on two consecutive cruises in South America, the first from Buenos Aires to Rio (for the carnival) and back, calling at various Brazilian and Uruguayan ports, with three days in Rio. The second took us from Buenos Aires to Cape Horn, then through the Beagle Channel to the Chilean fjords, ending at San Antonio, Chile, from where we would travel to Santiago to fly home. Twenty-eight days in all, during which I was booked to give ten talks on various maritime history subjects. My talk on the Falklands Conflict was vetoed as ‘too sensitive’ in view of the number of Argentinians onboard, and I gave an alternative talk. Otherwise all went well until we reached San Antonio.

In Buenos Aires we took time to visit the memorial to those lost in 1982 on the General Belgrano, which faces the naval hospital in Av. Patricias Argentinas, and the graves of Captain Hans Langsdorff (of the German pocket battleship Admiral Graf Spee), and four of his crew members, in the German Cemetery adjacent to La Chacarite Cemetery. At Puerto Madero, the impressive redeveloped dockland area of the old port (replete with fine restored cranes and re-purposed Victorian warehouses), we visited the Argentine Navy museum ships Presidente Sarmiento and Uruguay. The former was completed in 1897 by Laird Bros, Birkenhead, as a steam and sail training ship. During her forty-year active career she made thirty-seven extended training cruises with cadets of the Argentine Naval Academy, including six circumnavigations of the globe. The Uruguay came from the same builders, in 1874, as a barque-rigged steam and sail warship and was later used as an Antarctic exploration ship.

In Rio the naval museum and its preserved submarine were closed for the carnival holiday, and little could be seen of the naval base there. The cruise terminal was on the site of the beautifully restored and re-purposed Victorian dockside warehouses.
In Montevideo, from our ship, we got good views of the naval base (with what appeared to be the whole of the Uruguayan fleet berthed there) and the monumental headquarters building of the Uruguayan Navy and Coastguard. Adjacent to the cruise ship berths is a memorial to Admiral Graf Spee including one of her large rangefinders and an anchor. A little further out in the city we visited the Naval Museum, which, in addition to displays relating the history of the Uruguayan Navy, has a good exhibition of Graf Spee artefacts and is fronted by one of the 5.9in guns salvaged from the ship. Finally, we visited the Cementario del Norte, with its graves of most of the German sailors who died during the 1939 Battle of the River Plate, and the British Cemetery, where three British casualties of the battle, whose bodies were washed ashore, are buried.

The General Belgrano had sailed on her last, fateful, voyage, from Ushuaia, the Argentine port on the Beagle Channel. There we visited the group of memorials dedicated to those lost in the ‘Malvinas’ (Falklands) Conflict and the General Belgrano. Sentiment still runs high: banners on the harbour-front proclaim, ‘Ushuaia, Capital of the Malvinas’, whilst our tour boat in the Beagle Channel had a sign saying ‘Las Malvinas son Argentinas’.

In both Ushuaia and our next stop, Punta Arenas, Chile, Antarctic expedition and survey ships were much in evidence, including those of the Peruvian and Spanish navies and British Antarctic Survey, it being the end of the Antarctic summer. Punta Arenas (on the Strait of Magellan) is interesting in having three square-rigger hulks in the harbour, and we also visited the outdoor museum featuring replicas of Magellan’s Victoria, Fitzroy/Darwin’s Beagle, Shackleton’s James Caird and the Chilean schooner Ancud. The 500th anniversary of Magellan’s ‘discovery’ of his eponymous strait was being celebrated at various places during our cruise.

On the final day of the second cruise we were due to dock in San Antonio at 7 a.m., but at 2.30 a.m. the ship received a message saying that we could not dock. A cruise ship in another Chilean
Dockyards, May 2020

Port had reported that it had a small number of passengers who had contracted coronavirus, and the authorities had reacted by barring all cruise ships from Chilean ports. We had no reported cases of coronavirus onboard. Then ensued two days of negotiations and diplomatic wrangling, in which the Chilean president and the US government were also involved (we were on an American ship and half of the passengers were American). The ship remained anchored offshore and it transpired that the Chilean government was prepared to let provisions, medical supplies and fuel be brought out to the ship in barges, but would not let the ship dock. However, the trades unions and the mayor of San Antonio refused to cooperate and we had to try to find another, more amenable, port. The global situation was changing rapidly: by this time ports around the world were banning cruise ships, and this soon included those of all South American countries. This was the most uncertain and, for some, stressful part of the odyssey. We did not have enough fuel or provisions to get back to an American port. Were we destined to drift aimlessly on the seven seas like a latter-day Marie Celeste?

Fortunately, agreement was reached for us to restock at another Chilean port, Valparaiso, offshore without docking. Apparently, there was rivalry and no love lost, between the ports of Valparaiso and San Antonio, which probably helped explain Valparaiso’s decision. Restocking was a slow process, taking three days. Eventually we sailed – heading north through the tropics and across the equator to dock at San Diego, the nearest US port, after ten days’ sailing, a distance of over 5,000 miles. We sailed over calm seas in balmy temperatures, under sunny skies; we were not in lockdown and were able to enjoy the full facilities of our luxurious ship, so for most it was certainly no hardship.

‘Buy one cruise, get one free!’ was the joke, as most passengers enjoyed the extra fifteen days on the ship, with free drinks, free laundry and free Wi-Fi, as well as the usual meals, entertainment, pools, gym, etc. (A few passengers were desperate to get home as they had jobs to return to, or perhaps had caring responsibilities for others.)

Andrea and I had spent forty-three days on the ship, which had covered 15,000 miles. We made some good friends (two from Toronto and two from Texas) with whom we played cards and dined each day. I had given an additional six talks. Before disembarkation we had to complete a medical questionnaire, declaring that we were well, and had our body temperature taken. We were given face masks and plastic gloves, plus a packed lunch, and bussed to Los Angeles airport. The cruise company had booked a charter flight from Los Angeles to take all the British and some European

Left: The memorial at Ushuaia to the 323 men lost when the cruiser General Belgrano was sunk by HMS Conqueror.

Below: The replica of HMS Beagle at Punta Arenas. In the original ship Pringle Stokes and Robert Fitzroy surveyed large parts of the South American coastline, the Beagle Channel and the Strait of Magellan.
passengers back to Heathrow, where we landed on 31 March. Arriving home, as we approached our drive in a taxi, neighbours’ children cheered and let off party poppers, which was an unexpected delight. We then had to self-isolate. Fortunately, our daughter had arranged a supermarket delivery: we now have enough kitchen roll to last at least until Christmas!

However, as I write this, several days after our return, over a hundred South American passengers are still stuck on the ship: they were not permitted to enter the USA and their countries have closed their borders, even to their own citizens. The prospects for these people, and for the crew, many of whom are in a similar situation, hang in the balance.

Paul Brown

Book reviews

Ian Buxton, Shipbreaking at Faslane

Faslane was built as an emergency military port in the 1939–45 war. Following the cessation of hostilities, it was seeking a new purpose and in 1946 became a shipbreaking centre for Metal Industries then Shipbreaking Industries. Arguably it was Britain’s leading shipbreaking centre throughout this period. This excellent 71-page history by Society member Ian Buxton tells its story in this guise from 1946 until closure in 1980. Sixty-eight Royal Navy ships were cut up as well as a number of merchant vessels.

The demolition of any ship is a sad event but will allow unusual views of the layout and compartments of the ship in question: for example, a fascinating annotated photo shows the battleship Duke of York well cut down to just below lower deck in August 1959. Another diagram, by Ian Johnston, shows a plan of Faslane with all the berths, cranes, other equipment and offices, most illuminating.

The shipbreaker is of course in business to make a profit and the book includes some interesting statistics. These confirm that although steel scrap may be the ‘bread and butter’ of the shipbreaker it is non-ferrous metals and equipment that realise far higher prices.
A book packed with information, including a detailed list of all the ships demolished. Not just battleships and aircraft carriers demolished at Faslane, also smaller vessels such as frigates and midget submarines. Highly recommended.

The first illustration (top) shows the battleship Duke of York being broken up by the snowbound Faslane jetty in March 1958, and behind her may just be glimpsed the liner Asturias and the battleship Anson. The second (above) shows the liner Aquitania arriving for demolition under her own power in February 1950. Both in the book and from the author’s collection.

Published by the World Ship Society, the book is available from ilbuxton@outlook.com or 12 Grand Parade Tynemouth NE30 4JS at £10.95 plus £2 P&P (UK) and £5 elsewhere.

Richard Holme

Anthony Zarb-Dimech, Naval Contracting in Malta. The story of an old ship chandling family

When a ship came into port, be it a cargo vessel or a warship, there was much that had to be supplied to the ship besides what was standard issue at a naval dock or victualling yard or merchant shipyard. These supplies were invariably the trade of ships’ chandlers. These small-business concerns managed the bumboats that went out to meet incoming ships and attended them while in port, especially during the years when ships remained distant from shore to avoid desertion. The chandlers often made agreements with ships’ pursers to supply specific items or meet certain needs.
in the way of catering or clothing. They met those needs for bases on shore as well ships afloat and, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, provided caterers and assistants who worked on board ships meeting the needs of the different messes. Although ubiquitous in the past, because they were small-scale businesses the activities of the chandlers have been little discussed. This has been partly the consequence of limited documentation. Although they possessed boats, shops and warehouses and some trading accounts must have survived, their activities have attracted few economic historians. However, we now have a history of the Borda family of Malta which does much to fill a gap in our knowledge of these small but universal maritime traders.

Anthony Zarb-Dimech is to be commended for setting the activities of this family in their Mediterranean, Maltese and chronological history. He has not been able to use any government records but has gathered personal histories and made use of letters of recommendation with which ships' officers and messes repaid the extra efforts of their chandlers. These letters of recommendation were important for obtaining further service work, and clearly accrued in value within the Borda family as witness to their history of entrepreneurship and efficiency. The Borda family are the main subject of the book but they were typical and one chapter discusses other Maltese chandlers. Malta being central to the Mediterranean, it is easy to see how their work served shipping on passage between western Europe and the Far East, and how Maltese mess caterers travelled to ‘all parts of the world’.

They were especially welcome in British warships during the First World War. Indeed, Borda employees and other Maltese caterers died for Britain, most notably at the Battle of Jutland. If the family history is true, it is a sad reflection on British attitudes that the uncle of Spiro Mizzi, in charge of the catering on board HMS Defence, was virtually sentenced to death when the ship was sunk. ‘Not being British, he together with the other Maltese messmen were locked in the hold’ (p. 80).

At the end of the First World War, the NAAFI (the Navy, Army and Air Force Institution) took over the function of supplying British ships and other forces. Already Maltese chandlers had learned to diversify their businesses and the British rationalisation of their catering services encouraged the Maltese to serve equally the French, Australian, American and Greek navies. Some put their enterprise into developing important new businesses. Kenneth Borda became a banker and stockbroker of global standing; Spiro Mizzi imported cars and buses to create a company with interests in many sectors of Malta’s twentieth century economy.

This book demonstrates that ship chandlery has been a vital ingredient in the history and economy of Malta. Its legacy is still apparent in the Valletta waterfront buildings which include nineteen restored eighteenth-century warehouses, originally built to house the naval stores of the Knights of St John, but subsequently the premises of private businesses including chandlery. Indeed, during the twentieth century, with the growth of the tourist cruiser trade, the services of the port of Valletta still includes much which would once have been identified as chandlery. Centred on the history of a single family, this small book will be a useful source for students of maritime industries and of Malta’s naval history. It contains seven appendices and a bibliography. The latter includes websites, newspapers and magazines with some unusual references. It is well illustrated and has evidently been itself a work of service in bringing to notice an aspect of port and naval history that has been virtually ignored.

Roger Morriss

**DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

**31 October 2020**


**27 March 2021**

10–12 June 2021
Joint International Conference at Portsmouth: 'Dockyards as modes of naval architecture, maritime traditions and cultural heritage' (working title). In partnership with the Society for Nautical Research and supported by Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust and the National Museum of the Royal Navy, this ground-breaking international conference will address three themes:

1. Building a ship-of-the-line or warship
2. Dockyards as heritage
3. Dockyards as global hubs and regional centres of maritime culture.

It will include specialist behind-the-scenes archive and dockyard visits and a harbour tour.

We will contact members with details of the two events below likely to occur in Autumn 2020, once arrangements have been finalised.

A study day at Portsmouth to commemorate the late Ray Riley, postponed from 28 March due to coronavirus.

A day tour of Sheerness viewing the Officers’ Quarter.

CALL FOR PAPERS
NDS Conference: 27 March 2021
National Maritime Museum Greenwich
Dockyards and Baltic Campaigns (1721–2021): Comparisons and Transformations

This one-day conference will examine the role of the naval dockyards and bases that were closely associated with Baltic naval campaigns. 1721 was the year that the Great Northern War was finally concluded. The key dockyards in this war were Copenhagen, Karlskrona, Chatham, St Petersburg and Kronstadt. Britain’s concern was to maintain the balance of power, sending large squadrons into the Baltic to ensure the continued supply of naval stores: especially Russian hemp, Swedish iron and ‘East Country' timber.

Other conflicts, such as those in the Thirty Years War 1618–48, the Second Baltic War 1655–60, the Russo-Swedish war 1788–90, the 1918–20 Russian civil war, two World Wars and the twentieth century Baltic states’ wars of liberation are also within the scope of this conference.

If your proposal is accepted, the NDS will pay standard UK travel expenses (not international flights), your conference fee and lunch, publish it in our Transactions and give you a complimentary copy. Your talk will be 20–40 minutes. The published paper will be 6–10K words long, required six months after the Conference for editing.

Please send your title and 300-word synopsis (and any queries) by 30 October 2020 to Dr Paul Brown, paul.brown206@btinternet.com.