



Gunboat Yard boundary walls, watchtowers and gates

Haslar Gunboat Yard, Haslar Road,
Gosport, Hampshire

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Official list entry

Heritage Category: **Listed Building**

Grade: **II***

List Entry Number: **1431191**

Date first listed: **14-Jun-2016**

Date of most recent
amendment: **26-Aug-2022**

List Entry Name: **Gunboat Yard boundary walls, watchtowers
and gates**

Statutory Address 1: **Haslar Gunboat Yard, Haslar Road, Gosport,
Hampshire**

This List entry helps identify the building designated at this address for its special architectural or historic interest.

Unless the List entry states otherwise, it includes both the structure itself and any object or structure fixed to it (whether inside or outside) as well as any object or structure within the curtilage of the building.

For these purposes, to be included within the curtilage of the building, the object or structure must have formed part of the land since before 1st July 1948.

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(<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/minor-amendments/>)

Location

Statutory Address: **Haslar Gunboat Yard, Haslar Road, Gosport,
Hampshire**

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: **Hampshire**

District: **Gosport (District Authority)**

Parish: **Non Civil Parish**

National Grid **SZ6156598768**

Reference:

Summary

Gunboat yard walls, watchtowers, and gates, 1856.

Reasons for Designation

The boundary walls, watchtowers and gates, 1856, are listed at Grade II* for the following principal reasons:

Historic interest:

* the public-facing elements of a unique facility built to house the gunboat fleet found so invaluable during the Crimean War, and one of a handful of sites built in reaction to the conflict.

Architectural interest:

* good-quality, robust and well-detailed structures which reference the earlier hospital walls and reflect the importance of security for the facility.

Group value:

* with the other structures of the gunboat yard, and within the context of Haslar, Gosport, and Portsmouth as an important national centre of naval history and development.

History

Haslar Gunboat Yard is a unique naval site at Gosport, Hampshire. It operated as a yard for the housing and repair of British gunboats between 1856 and 1906, and subsequently for the gunboats' successors and other naval craft. The site comprises a series of original iron sheds for housing the gunboats, part of the traverser system used for their launch and movement and a collection of ancillary buildings relating to repair, maintenance and power provision both for the gunboat yard and the Royal Naval Hospital, Haslar on the opposite side of Haslar Road. The site is bounded by high walls with sentry posts, and has a guard house and police barracks.

The Portsmouth region has a long association with naval defence, thanks in part to its easily defensible natural harbour. A Norman motte and bailey towards the western side of the Gosport peninsula attests to a long history of occupation and awareness of the defensive characteristics of the area. Portsmouth had 'the merits of a good sheltered harbour, the proximity of the New Forest as a source of ships' timber, and a reasonable communication with

London' (Coad, 1989). The Earl of Sandwich wrote that Portsmouth was better able to be secured and defended than Plymouth and that 'Portsmouth is more central and happily situated for facilitating a junction of our ships from Eastward and Westward with a spacious and safe road for the rendezvous of the whole fleet' (Coad, 1989).

The Royal Navy was responsible for much of the development and infrastructure of the Portsmouth area. There were supplementary sites such as the Royal Clarence Victualling Yard and the Haslar Hospital, but the development was focused around the shipbuilding, repair, maintenance, and storage of the Navy's fleet. This activity occurred largely in the Portsmouth Dockyard, which sits to the east of the main natural harbour. These developments meant that Portsmouth was for a long time one of the most heavily fortified towns in Europe, the defences entirely due to the importance of the naval base. As the principal naval port Portsmouth was consistently at the forefront of innovation and development.

The British gunboat fleet was developed in the 1850s with the Crimean War (1853-56); they were small, steam-powered craft with one gun, 'light, swift, commodious, well-armed, easily handled, independent of wind and tide, and capable of acting separately or in concert' (Mechanics' Magazine, 1857) and it was thought, at the time, that they would always be of use in the British Navy. Although in use by a number of countries, the gunboat had peculiarly British associations due to its widespread use across the globe, giving rise to the phrase 'Send a Gunboat!'. Due to the nature of naval warfare being conducted, gunboats were ordered in large quantities during the 1850s and into the 1860s.

Following the Crimean War, it was deemed that a ready fleet of gunboats was necessary to ensure the safety of the English coast. Unlike their larger counterparts, gunboats were too small and too numerous (around 120) to hold in existing dry docks in naval ports such as Portsmouth and as a result they were frequently left at sea. Their iron parts, which included hulls, engines, and boilers, along with the frequent use of unseasoned timber, meant that storage afloat was not practical. The solution was to construct a separate yard where such vessels could be stored and repaired on dry land, potentially for long periods of time, whilst remaining seaworthy and ready for action.

Although a number of sites were considered for the yard, including Chatham Dockyard, Royal William Victualling Yard at Stonehouse, Plymouth, and Keyham Yard at Devonport Dockyard, the final decision rested on Haslar. The site chosen was to the north of the hospital, bordering Haslar Creek, the waterfront access along the northern boundary enabling ease of launching vessels at high tide. Maps from the early nineteenth century show that the site was undeveloped farmland prior to the Navy's leasehold, though infrastructure associated with the hospital, such as wells, had encroached on the area.

The speed at which the yard was constructed means that there is little map evidence to show the stages of the site's development. However, it is known that the building was phased, beginning with a row of ten sheds: those which remain standing today. A steam-powered traverser system (NHLE ref 1001810) was built to haul the boats out of the water, and to move

them along and into the individual sheds. The designs for the facility were undertaken by the Admiralty Works Department, under Colonel Greene, the Director of Works and William Scamp, the Deputy Director of Engineering and Architectural Works. It was a project of great magnitude, with at least five contractors, each the most eminent in their field, employed to do the work. The brickwork was contracted to Messrs Rigby of London.

The importance of the vessels was reflected by the fortification of the site, with its high brick walls, sentry look-outs, police barracks and guard house. They surround the site on three sides; the fourth is bounded by the creek. The main gates, adjacent to the guard house and police barracks, are on the north-east side, with a secondary entrance and an entrance into the separate engine house yard on the south-east. There are watch towers on the angles, and at the northern extremity. The walls are designed with reference to those surrounding the adjacent Royal Naval Hospital; their canted coping is very similar. At the south corner the walls continue to form an entranceway to the temporarily used 'New Burial Ground' of 1857.

Following the end of the war and the emergence of problems with the gunboats, a vastly diminished number were retained to form the reserve. As a result, later in the 1860s 40 of the 50 gunboat sheds were moved to the Portsmouth Dockyard, and the traverser system was shortened. The yard was put up for let in 1870, though is known, by 1871, to have been back in use. By 1906, however, gunboats were considered obsolete naval technology and all had been scrapped or retired due to maintenance costs and the advent of new, smaller craft.

The changing role of gunboats had implications for the use and layout of the yard. It continued in general use through the First and Second World Wars for the service and repair of naval craft, including motor torpedo boats, the gunboats' successors. From 1939 until 1956 the eastern part of the site was part of HMS Hornet, the Coastal Forces Patrol. In 1955 a new slip was built, and the original steam locomotive, the Elephant, replaced with an electric version. Following the decommissioning of HMS Hornet the site gradually went into use as a mooring yard for naval personnel, and in 1964 was officially opened as a naval yacht club. The rails embedded on either side of the 1955 slip appear to date from this period of use. In the 1970s the traverser system was abandoned, and the cradles and other machinery removed. The new Haslar bridge, opened in 1978, prevented large craft accessing the yard. Many of the sheds were removed in the 1980s and 90s. The south-west of the yard began to be used by the Admiralty Experiment Works from the late C19. Since 2001 the south-western part of the site has been in use by a naval defence contractor, and the north-eastern part remains in use as a sailing centre.

Two bays of the walls to the southern extremity of the south-east stretch have been rebuilt following the removal of a pump house in the late C19, and in the early to mid-C20 a new entrance was created towards the south end of the same wall. Two other entrances, leading to the rear of the gunboat sheds, and to the south end of the testing tank, were inserted, possibly in the late C20. The two original secondary entrances have been blocked.

Details

Gunboat yard walls, watchtowers, and gates, 1856.

ARCHITECT: the design of the gunboat yard was by the Admiralty Works Department, under Colonel Greene, the Director of Works and William Scamp, the Deputy Director of Engineering and Architectural Works. The brickwork was entrusted to Messrs Rigby of London.

MATERIALS: red brick laid in Flemish bond. The watchtowers have slate roofs and stone cills, and the gate piers have limestone dressings.

PLAN: the walls enclose the gunboat yard on the south-east and north-east sides, and on the south-west side they survive but now form the south-west elevation of No 1 Ship Tank, built for the Admiralty Experiment Works in 1886 and extended in 1957. There are three watch towers: one at the walls' junction, the other two at the north and south extremities. The main gates are in the centre of the north-east wall. There are two inserted gateways on the south-east wall, and there is a break in the walls at the point of the engine house complex. At the southern corner the walls extend to form an entranceway to the former burial ground.

ELEVATIONS: the walls are c4m high and have regular recessed panels along their length; occasional ramps (curved steps to the coping) adjust the wall height according to the topography. There is a projecting course of brick along the top, upon which canted brick forms the coping.

The main gates have a pair of substantial pedimented sentry posts forming gate piers on either side of the entranceway. Each is hollow and has a slit window in order for a guard to see out. Between the posts is a round-arched opening, blocked on the north-west side. On the inside elevation are various recessed arches for sentries.

The two blocked secondary gates on the south-east elevation have narrower square piers with stone bands and overhanging stone pier caps. The early C20 entrance is canted back from the line of the wall, and has square piers with pyramidal stone caps.

The burial ground entrance is built in the same style and has curved walls recessing from the road. The central opening has been blocked.

The two-storey watchtowers are square in plan with outward facing round-arched slit windows on each storey. They have a brick corbel table and pyramidal roofs. On the inner walls the towers have segmental arched openings to the ground floors. Flights of steps are built along the walls, with short sentry walks leading the upper floor of the towers, and creating arched shelters below.

Sources

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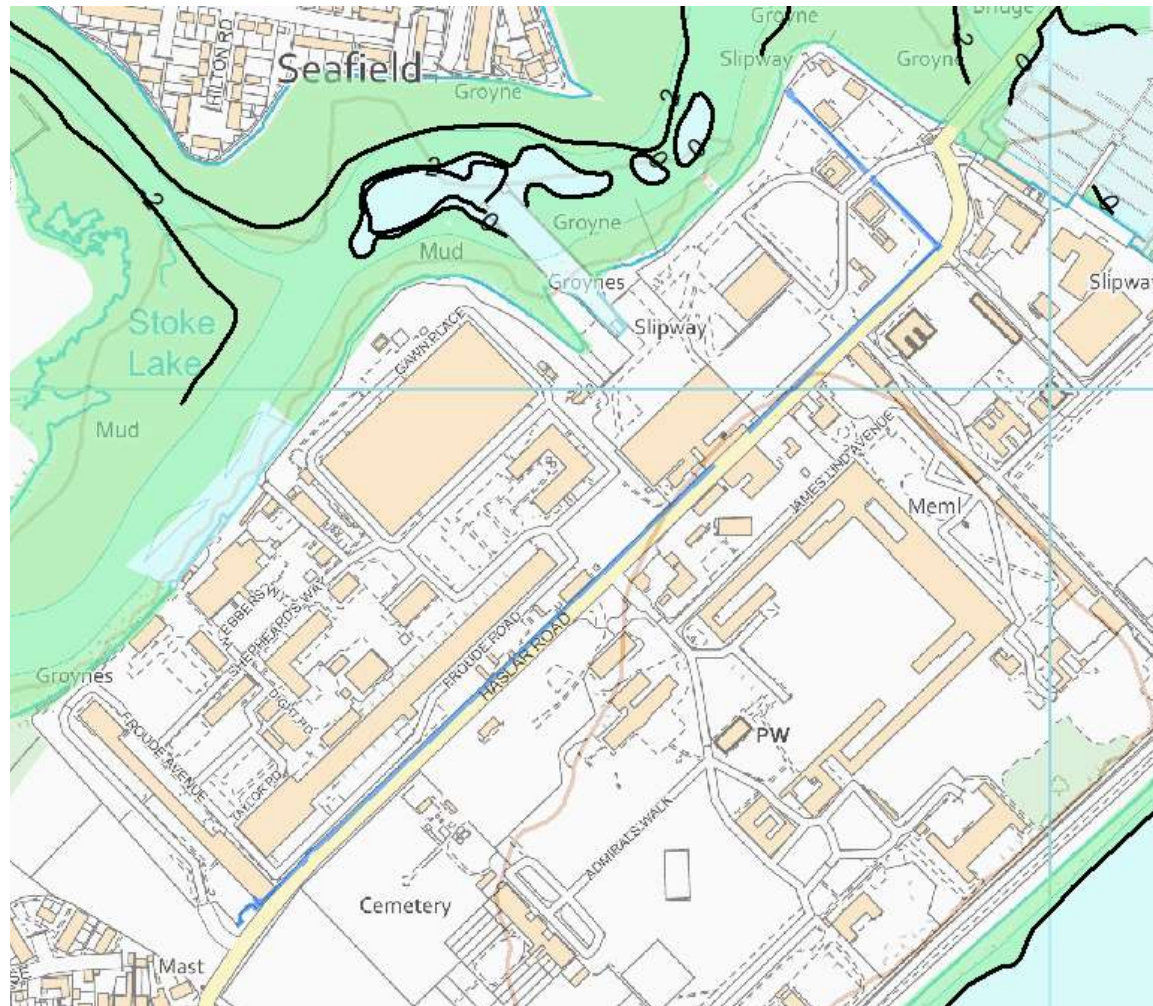
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Available at: [https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/15-2014?](https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/15-2014?searchType=research+report&search=hendriks)

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Legal

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.



Map

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