



Gunboat Sheds and Workshops

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Official list entry

Heritage Category: **Listed Building**

Grade: **I**

List Entry Number: **1431190**

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

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

List Entry Name: **Gunboat Sheds and Workshops**

Location Description: Gunboat Sheds and Workshops, Haslar
Gunboat Yard, Haslar Road, Gosport,
Hampshire, PO12 1RG

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.

Understanding list entries

(<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/understanding-list-entries/>)

Corrections and minor amendments

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

Location

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	SZ6172198973
Reference:	

Summary

A row of ten gunboat sheds and three maintenance workshops, 1856 by William Scamp, the Deputy Director of the Admiralty Engineering and Architectural Works.

Reasons for Designation

The gunboat sheds and workshops, 1856 by William Scamp, are listed at Grade I for the following principal reasons:

- * Historic interest: 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;
- * Technological interest: a pioneering and successful large-scale example of a steam-driven traverser system for gunboats;
- * Architectural interest: illustrating the foremost developments in iron framing and prefabricated iron technology, and incorporating architectural flourishes and good-quality construction;
- * Interest of the architect: built to designs by William Scamp, the Deputy Director of the Admiralty Engineering and Architectural Works, and the overseer of significant C19 building works and developments at the Naval dockyards;
- * 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!'. Initially gunboats were built of timber but, by the 1870s, composite boats of timber and iron were being constructed; by the C20 these vessels were made entirely of steel. 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 (c120) 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 contract for the gunboat sheds, initially known as covered slips, was awarded to Henry Grissell's Regents Canal Iron Works, based on their experience at the Royal Opera House and the new Houses of Parliament. Plans exist for the installation of permanent roofing, and the

insertion of skylights, from 1860.

By 1859 there are known to have been 40 sheds. In the early 1860s a further ten sheds were erected, as well as a new jetty and crane at the north-east of the site, assisting with repairs and lifting heavy machinery without the need to remove boats from the water.

Following the end of the war and the inspection of gunboats it emerged that a great number had been hastily built, often using green timber and insufficiently-long copper bolts. Those considered irreparable were condemned to be broken up, whilst others were sold, or converted to coal depots. A vastly diminished number were retained to form the reserve. As a result, later in the 1860s 40 of the 50 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 for the storage of gunboats: a new fleet of iron vessels was commissioned, and new sheds were erected for their storage; these have not survived. At the same time as this early-1870s refitting, the creek was dredged and plans suggest a jetty extension and reconstruction. 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.

The two-storey brick structure in the seventh bay of the sheds is likely to date from this period.

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 for the Admiralty's experimental 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.

Minor alterations to the fabric of the gunboat sheds have been made to adapt the building to different patterns of use, such as the infilling of the gables of the rear wall of the row of sheds, and the insertion or blockage of openings. Strengthening tension cabling was added in 1993, and new roof coverings have been installed.

Details

A row of ten gunboat sheds and three maintenance workshops, 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 ironwork was contracted to Henry Grissell's Regents Canal Iron Works.

MATERIALS: the sheds are constructed from wrought and cast iron with timber weather-boarded gables and a corrugated sheet roof. Red brick is used for the fire-proofing end walls, the workshops and the ancillary building, and is principally laid in Flemish bond, with alterations and insertions in stretcher bond. There are iron rails and associated fixtures.

PLAN: a continuous row of ten sheds, each 9m wide and 35m deep, aligned roughly south-west to north-east, in line with Haslar Creek. In the seventh bay is a two-storey ancillary building, and attached to the rear are maintenance workshops.

There are sets of six rails embedded in the floor, running the length of each bay.

EXTERIOR: a row of ten open-fronted sheds supported by internal ironwork, each with a shallow pitched roof with weather-boarded gables. The rear (south-eastern) wall is plan brickwork to the seven north-eastern bays; the remaining three bays are open to the rear.

There are free-standing firebreak brick walls at either end with recessed panels and a number of blocked openings, notably, round-arched doorways with brick arches.

There are three maintenance workshops to the rear of the gunboat sheds. One is adjoined, with

the pitch of its roof in line with that of the sheds and a wide, round-arched entrance from within the seventh bay of the sheds. The other two are orientated perpendicularly adjoining the first workshop. The workshop that is adjoined to the sheds is blind, except for a blocked oculus in the southern gable, and a partially glazed slate roof. The other two workshops have a row of round-arched windows with projecting cills and timber multiple-pane fixed casements, and roof lanterns. Entrance is via a segmental arched doorway on the gable end. A flat-roofed extension has been added on the south-east elevation.

The 1950s building is inserted within the seventh bay of the sheds. It has a rectangular plan, with sliding timber double doors on the outward end, and an external staircase on the opposite end. The long side elevations are heavily fenestrated with regularly sized and spaced windows in multiple-pane metal casements.

INTERIOR: the sheds are open-plan internally, with bays articulated by a row of seven columns and stanchions supporting trusses. The bays are generally c10m wide, but between the third and fourth bays columns create an additional narrow bay, possibly intended for housing machinery. There are three variations of columns: those forming the colonnade of the narrow bay are Tuscan, those along the north-western elevation are cylinders cast in two pieces; both are hollow and were designed to disperse rainwater. The remainder of the columns are the cross-beam variety, cast in two sections. The roof trusses are bolted to the columns and include decorative spandrels. Steel cabling and cross-bracing was added in 1993. The inward faces of the rear wall and the firebreaks have recessed panels.

The interiors of the workshops are plainly detailed, with some stepped brickwork. All fireplaces have been removed, and chimneys truncated. The kingpost roof trusses are exposed.

The interior of the 1950s building was not inspected.

Sources

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Plan elevations and section for permanent roofing to ten slips, Haslar Gunboat Yard, Haslar, Gosport, Hampshire. Historic England Archive, Swindon, ref MD95/06494

Elevation sections and details for permanent roofing to ten slips, Haslar Gunboat Yard, Haslar, Gosport, Hampshire. Historic England Archive, Swindon, ref MD95/06493

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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

This map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. This copy shows the entry on 10-Jul-2026 at 13:05:47.

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End of official list entry