

Portsmouth Harbour, Spithead and the Isle of Wight as the first Cultural Seascape to be inscribed on the World Heritage List

Draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

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Portsmouth Harbour, Spithead, the north-eastern coast of the Isle of Wight and their surrounding coastlines merit international recognition for their rich and varied maritime cultural heritage, arising from the theme 'Defence of the Realm'. The site is a land- and seascape shaped by natural and human influences over many millennia.

The great natural harbour of Portsmouth on the south coast of England has significant pre-historic remains from the last ice age when it was shaped by the Solent River. Spithead, the area of the Solent between Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight, and Portsmouth Harbour are framed to the north by Portsdown Hill, a chalk outcrop, and to the south by the hill on which Ryde in the Isle of Wight stands. From the earliest Paeleolithic period there is terrestrial evidence of human occupation which relates to evidence from both submerged landscapes and the inter-tidal area. From the Mesolithic era there are peat deposits under water, preserved in various pockets where conditions allowed and stone tool finds. From the Bronze Age there is growing evidence in the intertidal zone, mostly on the Isle of Wight shore, and peat deposits in the submerged landscape; from the Iron Age/Roman period: Portchester Castle and offshore finds of amphorae. For the Saxon period there are fish traps on Peewit Island in Portsmouth Harbour and between Quarr and Wootton Creek.

The site's human history is in its geography: the combination of sheltered anchorage and large harbour easy to defend from enemy attack around its narrow entrance was why the Romans constructed Portchester Castle at the head of the harbour from 380 AD as one of Forts of the Saxon Shore, their largest fortress in northwest Europe. A Romanesque keep and church were added in the 11th century. From the seventeenth century Fort Cumberland defended the approach to Langstone Harbour, gaining its star fortress form in the eighteenth century.

'The English royal dockyards, victualling yards and hospitals formed what are arguably the largest industrial centres in Britain before the Industrial Revolution, while their economic impact was out of all proportion to their size' (Coad 1989).

'By the middle of the eighteenth century the royal dockyards and the navy had become 'by a large margin the largest industrial organisation in the western world' (Rodger 1986).

Over the last four centuries, Portsmouth Dockyard has developed into a modern naval base with the full complement of supporting facilities around the harbour, many of them supplied by water: gunwharf, victualling, hospital, ammunition stores and magazines. The historic towns of Fareham and Gosport on the western and north western shores of the harbour and Ryde Isle of Wight have significant social and economic links to the development of services and supplies to national defence.

In response to a perceived threat from the French in the 1860s and 1870s a ring fortress was constructed to defend the dockyard and supporting establishments: massive land forts encircling the harbour along Portsdown Hill and in Fareham and Gosport, and four sea forts between Southsea, Ryde and Bembridge Isle of Wight and associated batteries such as Puckpool Ryde. In Haslar, Gosport there is a gunboat yard associated with the great Victorian engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel, who was born in Portsmouth in 1806. These establishments and the historic towns around the harbour contain a significant architectural and engineering legacy.

There are several technological and medical world firsts associated with the harbour and its surroundings. The most important is Block Mills, where the world's first steam-powered mass production factory using metal machine tools was developed by Marc Brunel, Henry Maudeslay, Simon Goodrich and others. Simon Goodrich devised the world's first steam powered dredger. Samuel Bentham devised the first working caissons to close dry docks; the first use of circular saws also occurred in the dockyard. The pioneering ship-testing tanks in Haslar, Gosport were built by William Froude and his son in the 1880s - a facility which is still in operation.

James Lind (1716-1794) Chief Physician at Haslar Royal Naval Hospital from 1762-1772 published 'A treatise of the scurvy' in 1753 based on comparative clinical trials; he also proposed distilling fresh water from sea water. Haslar Hospital was designed by Theodore Jacobsen - at the time the largest brick building in Europe. Naval surgeons based at Haslar pioneered treatments which were world firsts in the history of medicine, including Dr. Cleave's discovery of the importance of roughage in the diet in the 1930s.

In 1910 Grange Airfield, already in War Office ownership and manned by the Royal Artillery, was developed on flat land between Fort Rowner and Fort Grange for experiments in 'heavier than air' flight, using a towed bi-plane wing built at the United Services College Windsor. The wind tunnel in Fort Grange was used to test aircraft stability curves on aerofoil sections under the direction of Dr. A P Thurston (The History of Gosport Airfield 1956 Vivian Gibson). Key developments in flying training were devised from 1917 by Lt. Col Robert Smith-Barry, Commanding Officer of 60 Squadron based at Grange. These became known as the 'Gosport system': trained instructors to teach the principles of flying and pupils in the pilot seat at the controls, communicating via the 'Gosport Tube'. In 1918 teams from Gosport travelled to America, France, Argentina and Chile; the Gosport System became the basis of all worldwide flying training. In 1925 Captain Lindbergh landed at Grange in the Spirit of St. Louis after his world record breaking flight to Paris. In the interwar years Grange airfield became a Royal Air Force Fleet Air Arm base and a centre of excellence for many early deck landing and aircraft catapult trials and aircraft torpedo development.

HMS Daedalus was associated with key events of WWII due to its strategic significance. Intensive activity took place there in the build up to D-Day; significantly more sorties were launched from Lee than any other UK airfield on 6th June 1944 when accuracy of coastal bombardment was dependent on the air-spotting role of pilots from Daedalus. The site developed into a key Naval Aviation Base with a vastly expanding camp and airfield to the north and north east of the pre-war site. The Whitehead torpedo was tested in the diving lake at Horsea Island. During WWII degaussing of ships was developed at HMS Vernon, and shipborne radar to detect aircraft in Eastney Fort East. In the mid-twentieth century the invention of freeze drying took place in Royal Clarence Victualling Yard.

Preserved ships: Mary Rose, HMS Victory, HMS Warrior 1860 and Holland I represent key developments in warship design. Mary Rose was raised from the Solent seabed in 1984; significant historic wrecks including Invincible, Edgar and Royal Sovereign and other important underwater heritage are identified in Spithead.

Portsmouth's green seafront Southsea Common was for centuries the assembly point for armies and naval forces departing for war, preserving it - as a field of fire - from development until 1922, when it was purchased by Portsmouth Corporation. It is now listed as a historic landscape. War Cemeteries: Haslar Hospital cemetery and the naval cemetery in Clayhall Road Gosport contain significant memorials to British and foreign naval personnel. Southsea and Gosport seafronts and Victoria Park Portsmouth have important memorials to international events launched from the area.

D-Day in June 1944, the world's greatest seaborne invasion was co-ordinated at Southwick House just to the north of Portsdown Hill; a large part of the invasion forces assembled in the area and left from Portsmouth dockyard - as did the Falklands Task Force in 1982.

Ryde, Alverstoke and Southsea have significant Regency and early Victorian planned developments occupied by naval and military personnel, including Owen's Southsea, an early garden suburb developed by Thomas Ellis Owen from 1830-60. His Alverstoke Crescent and communal garden in Gosport was restored by the local community. Vernon Square Garden in Ryde and the Porter's Garden in HM Naval Base were also created by local people.