

United Kingdom Maritime Collections Initiative

Museum Policy Paper

Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust

1. Chatham Historic Dockyard - the Site and its Significance

Chatham Historic Dockyard is a site of international maritime heritage significance, encompassing an area of some 80 acres. It contains approximately 100 buildings and structures, of which 47 are scheduled as Ancient Monuments. It is the most complete example in the UK, and arguably the world, of an 18th Century dockyard equipped to build, repair and maintain the ships of the Navy. In addition it includes an important group of later historic buildings which chart the increasing use of iron and steam in warship construction through the 19th and into the 20th Century.

The considerable variety of buildings and structures within the Historic Dockyard contributes to the site's great historic and architectural importance. These buildings and structures give a complete picture of the processes involved in building warships for the Royal Navy from the Age of Sail to the heyday of the British Empire and beyond. From ship design, through the preparation and working of timber and iron, the manufacture of rope, sails, flags, paints, rolled lead and galvanised iron, to ship construction, repair and refit on the slips and in the dry docks; all are clearly depicted on the Chatham site. At other dockyards the majority of such structures were demolished to make way for newer facilities, or were destroyed during the Second World War. Chatham is a unique survival of this key period in British and world history.

The Royal Dockyard at Chatham had two distinct roles; as a fleet base and as a naval dockyard charged with the building and maintenance of the ships of the Royal Navy. From the mid-eighteenth century Chatham's role as a fleet base diminished as Britain's strategic focus shifted from Europe to the Empire; at the same time her importance as a centre for naval shipbuilding grew, culminating in her central role in submarine construction in the post-Dreadnought years of the 20th Century.

In the latter years of the 19th Century, Chatham, along with Portsmouth and Devonport, became one of the three home manning ports of the Royal Navy. The Chatham Port Division encompassed a little under a third of the Navy's ships and personnel (except officers) and its men and ships served with distinction during both World Wars. Centralised drafting, introduced in 1956, replaced the Divisional system, however thereafter, a number of ships remained Chatham based, including HMS Endurance, the Antarctic Patrol Vessel, that was to come to prominence during the Falklands Crisis of 1982.

Throughout her history, therefore, Chatham played a crucial role in the projection of Britain's power and influence on the global stage; a fact that has been recognised in the yard's nomination, together with its associated defences and other military installations (spanning some 400 years), as a potential World Heritage Site.

2. Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust and its Objectives

2.1. The Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust is a registered charity whose principal objects are defined as follows:

2.1.1 To secure for the public benefit the preservation of the Historic Dockyard at Chatham in the county of Kent in a manner appropriate to its archaeological, historical and architectural importance; and

2.1.2 To promote and foster for the public benefit a wide knowledge and understanding of the archaeological, historical and architectural significance of the Historic Dockyard.

2.2 In addressing the above, the Trust must recognise a number of key aspects of the Chatham story it has to tell:

2.2.1 Chatham's pivotal role in the 17th Century as a fleet base and as a centre of excellence for naval shipbuilding, refit and repair from the 18th Century;

2.2.2 the part played by Chatham-built ships in projecting Britain's influence on the world stage, from the *Sunne*, launched in 1586, which fought the Spanish Armada, to the Cold War role played until 1991 by HM Submarine *Ocelot*, the last warship built for the Royal Navy at Chatham;

2.2.3 the role during the 20th Century of the Chatham Port Division and Chatham based ships, through both World Wars and the Cold War;

2.2.4 the role of Chatham and the Medway in fostering important developments in naval technology, from the development of the wooden warship in the 17th & 18th Centuries (including the construction of *Victory*), through the introduction of iron, steel and steam to shipbuilding in 19th Century (*HMS Achilles*, the first iron built battleship to be built in a Royal Dockyard, was constructed at Chatham), to the pioneering technologies associated with submarines and the birth of naval aviation in the 20th Century;

2.2.5 the social impact of the Dockyard and the Chatham Port Division upon the local and wider community.

2.3 The above will be achieved through the following:

2.3.1 The development of appropriate museum galleries and other exhibits illustrating the Chatham story; and

- 2.3.2 The development of collections and curatorial (and other) expertise in respect of warship design and construction (including the shipbuilding trades associated with such activities) and the history of the Chatham Port Division of the Royal Navy.
- 2.4 In addition the range of historic warships assembled at Chatham (see 4 below) places the Trust in a strong position to develop curatorial, technical and other expertise, in the display, interpretation and preservation of historic ships.

3. Museum Galleries and Exhibits

In preparation

Museum of the Dockyard (opens Easter 2001)

A new gallery to tell the over-arching story of Chatham Dockyard through four centuries:

- Chatham Dockyard as a fleet base and Royal Dockyard
- Development of warship design and construction
- Role of Chatham-built ships and Chatham Port Division

Current

Wooden Walls

- Shipbuilding in the age of the sailing Navy
- Life in the 18th Century Dockyard

The Ropery

- 18th/19th Century industrial processes (spinning & ropemaking)

HMS Gannet (1878)

- Development in ship design – composite construction and transitional period (use of iron and steam)
- Policing the Empire (Pax Britannica)
- Life in the Victorian Navy

HMS Cavalier (1944)

- Development in ship design - longitudinal framing and transition from riveted to welded construction
- Associated developments in 20th Century naval technology (armament – missile age)
- Role of smaller ships of the Royal Navy in the Second World War and Cold War
- Living conditions on board

HMS Ocelot (1962)

- Development in submarine design – O class submarines, leading cold war diesel electric boats
- Chatham's submarine story
- Life on Board

Aspirational

Ironclads Gallery

A gallery to be located in No 1 Smithery, the dockyard's principal metal working facility built in 1808 that remained in use until 1974. This gallery will develop the story of the design and construction of 19th and 20th century surface warships and that of mechanical marine propulsion.

Submarine Gallery

A gallery to tell Chatham's 20th century submarine story. As the builder of 57 submarines in 54 years between 1908 and 1966 Chatham was rivalled only by Vickers in terms of production. Thereafter the yard continued as a major submarine refit base that included a large nuclear submarine refitting and refuelling facility from 1966 until closure.

Birth of Naval Aviation

Early naval aviators were carried on the books of HMS Pembroke, depot of the Chatham Port Division, and were based at a number of sites around the Medway and Swale estuaries including Kingsnorth, Grain and Eastchurch.

4. Collections

The Trust's collections fall into a number of categories related to the main collecting themes as identified in section 2.2 above. These include three ships and associated objects and equipment (HMS Gannet, an 1878 Medway built Osprey /Doterel class sloop; HMS Cavalier, 1944 built war emergency destroyer (owned by a subsidiary trust); and HMS Ocelot, 1962 built 'O' class submarine); a collection of small naval craft; tools and equipment relating to the principal shipbuilding trades; naval ordnance and material related to the Chatham Port Division of the Royal Navy.

Annex

HMS Cavalier

HMS Cavalier (1944) was acquired for preservation at Chatham Historic Dockyard in December 1998. Cavalier is a nationally significant vessel being the only Second World War Royal Navy destroyer or small escort vessel to survive in Britain. Refitted during the 1950's and 1960's she continued to perform distinguished service during the long years of the Cold War, before paying off at Chatham in 1972. Her very high degree of both internal and external completeness means that she can be regarded as a time capsule for life at sea in the Royal Navy over a period of 3 decades.

Cavalier is owned by the HMS Cavalier (Chatham) Trust Limited, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust. The principal objects of the HMS Cavalier (Chatham) Trust are as follows:

1. To promote for the public benefit the preservation and use of the former Royal Naval destroyer HMS Cavalier (1944) in a manner which reflects its historical importance and to commemorate the men and women of the Royal Navy who lost their lives on such ships during the Second World War by the establishment of a fitting memorial in conjunction therewith; and
2. To advance public education in the historical importance of Cavalier.

Cavalier forms an integral part of the visitor attraction at the Historic Dockyard where she is displayed alongside the former HM Submarine Ocelot (1962) and HMS Gannet (1878). The Trust's key aims with regard to Cavalier are as follows:

1. To tell through Cavalier the story of the destroyers of the Second World War and of their vital role in Britain's war effort (including the memorial); and
2. To illustrate through HMS Cavalier developments in naval technology during the middle years of the 20th Century.

RNLI Lifeboat! Collection

The Historic Dockyard provides a home for the Royal National Lifeboat Institution's national historic collection of lifeboats in the Lifeboat! gallery. Together the boats that form this collection are very significant, many featuring in the National Historic Ship Committee's lists of Core and Designated Vessels.

Whilst the Trust provides the location and 'front of house' services to the Lifeboat! gallery, curatorial responsibility and the provision of curatorial expertise remains the responsibility of the RNLI at Poole.