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GOSPORT RECORDS

Royal Marine Barracks, Gosport

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The map on the inside back cover, the badges of HMS Dolphin, HMS Fisgard and the Royal Marines, and the Player Coat of Arms are the work of Smile Design.

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Foreword

by

Admiral of the Fleet the Earl Mountbatten of Burma, KG, PC, GCB, OM,
GCSI, GCIE, GCVO, DSO, FRS

Because of its geographical location the shores of Gosport have seen the arrival and departure by sea of a great many people throughout history. My great grand-mother Queen Victoria often travelled through Gosport on her way to Osborne House in the Isle of Wight. The Royal Yacht, VICTORIA AND ALBERT moored off Clarence Yard and Her Majesty would embark from the train at a special station close to the jetty.

By the middle of the 18th Century there was a small amount of shipbuilding in Gosport and just before that there were in fact three HM Ships bearing the proud name of GOSPORT. All three were frigates and the first was launched in 1696 and surrendered in 1706; the second was launched in 1707 and broken up in 1735 and the last was launched in 1740 and broken up in 1768.

From the begining of the 18th Century there was a brewery supplying beer to the Navy which was located in what is now the Royal Clarence Yard and the article on Weevil in this issue gives a fascinating account of the people and places involved; it is a masterpiece of historical research by Godfrey Williams.

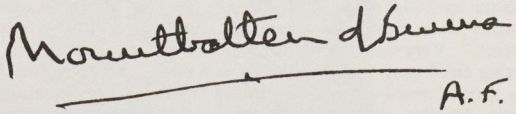
Between 1848 and 1923 the Royal Marines were stationed at Forton Barracks and in her article Mrs. Dione Venables gives a fascinating picture of their long stay in Gosport. I am immensely proud to be Life Colonel Commandant of the Royal Marines and I feel sure that any Borough at any time in history shares a great sense of honour in being associated with this great Corps.

For a shorter period the training ships which formed HMS FISGARD were moored off Hardway and Lieutenant Cooper, one of the sailors who trained there, has written his reminiscences in a way which will give much pleasure to those who recall those times.

But perhaps Gosport is best known for its association with the Submarine Service. This year celebrates the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the submarine branch at Fort Blockhouse which later became DOLPHIN and as a submariner myself, having served in the K6 nearly 60 years ago, I know how much Gosport has come to mean to that branch of the Service. In his article Commander Compton-Hall, the Curator of the Royal Navy Submarine Museum, has traced the development of the old fort right up to its present strategic role in modern defence.

The people of Gosport have just reason to be proud of its long association with the Royal Marines and the Royal Navy. Even today I maintain close links through the Royal Navy Hospital which I visit frequently and which in a sense has become my local 'surgery'.

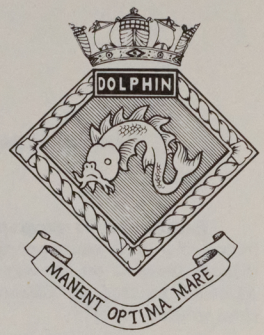
Our understanding of the present and our hopes for the future of our country must be firmly based on our knowledge of what has been in the past and I hope that this issue of Gosport Records will be widely read, not only locally but by all those who have a love of our great heritage.



Fort Blockhouse

by

Richard Compton-Hall



Submarines are a familiar sight today from Gosport but they are relative newcomers to Fort Blockhouse. Black, sinister and rather slug-like, as someone once unkindly said, the forerunners of our modern battle fleet did not appear in Haslar Creek until 1905. But it was nearly 500 years earlier that their Base had its beginings.

The fortification of Portsmouth Harbour was authorised by King Edward III in 1342; but the wheels of bureaucracy turned slowly even in those days. It seems more than probable that the Government was already wringing its hands about the shortage of funds in much the same way as it does now. It wasn't until 1431, 90 years later with King Henry VI on the throne, that the planned work was actually done. In that year the first defensive tower on the Gosport side of the harbour was erected.

By then hostile French fleets were operating in the Channel and their presence lent a certain urgency to the work in hand. In fact it is at least partly due to a continual series of frights from the French over the centuries that God's Port looks as it does today. Meanwhile Portsmouth itself was being fortified and by the time that King Henry VIII's marital problems had come to a head the area was heavily defended.

The historian Leland records, in 1540, that "the land at the Weste Pointe of Portsmouth Haven is a sandyness and some brekith of gyving place to the open sea. There is a round stone toure with ordinaunce at the west point of the mouth of Portsmouth haven."

On 18th July 1545 the French fleet actually rounded the eastern tip of the Isle of Wight and took up a position between Brading and Ryde. It was amidst the hasty but ineffectual attempts of the English fleet to come to grips with the enemy that the Mary Rose was lost, heeled hard over by an unexpected gust of wind on an otherwise calm day with her gunports open and the heavy guns imprudently unsecured. Having once seen the enemy within striking distance of Portsmouth – indeed the French landed a few troops on the Isle of Wight itself – nobody had any doubts about the need to make the defences even stronger.

Thereafter, up until the middle of the 19th century reinforcing work continued with spasmodic, frenetic energy. Blockhouse itself, of course, was heavily involved in successive panic measures. From the original small wooden block-house, standing on what was then an island at the mouth of the harbour, it was possible by 1846 to say "Blockhouse Fort is now a complete fortification in itself, having in the present century been greatly improved and enlarged. A salute from this covered bastion has a remarkably splendid effect." Very true. Yachtsmen at the point at, say, noon on the Queen's birthday when a 21-gun salute is being fired may remark that they feel the effect splendidly. "During the reign of Queen Anne the ditches around the Fort communicated freely with the harbour", (the account continues) "the walls were of little elevation and in the centre stood the small dwelling-house still in existence. The approach on the land side is by a winding passage with a wall on each side and a drawbridge leading to a handsome stone gateway over which is inscribed on a neat tablet '1708', three cannons, three balls and the word 'Anno' ". There is something hard to define, that appeals in that description. But, then, even the most hardened submariner would probably admit that Blockhouse has always had a particular appeal and a charm of its own even when the bar is shut and the hot-water system fails two minutes before a submarine secures alongside after a long absence.

It should not be thought, despite appearances, that the Fort during its long existence had been wont to engage in any notable warlike activities. The sole recorded incidence of shots being fired in anger (up until the Second World War) was in 1642 when Portsmouth, which had unwisely declared for the King, came under fire from a Roundhead battery mounted in Blockhouse itself. The Parliamentary aim seems to have been unsteady because one shot, at least, fell far over the Cavalier Bastions across the harbour and landed heavily in St. Thomas' church.

Blockhouse, in the main, confined itself over the years to making preparations for war and looking as warlike as possible without actually getting involved. At the same time it enjoyed a number of social activities. By 18th century standards its genteel air was at marked variance with the noisy roistering that used to go on over on the rough old Portsmouth side. It is recorded, for instance, that ratings on leave, when tired of Portsmouth's brazen attractions, would engage a wherryman to transport them to the more sedate pleasures of Oyster Lake – that is to say, Haslar Creek. There, too, there was often some harmless entertainment to be had from viewing the corpses of criminals hung in chains on the sand spit at the bottom of the Creek. This was presumably close to where the Dolphin Quartermaster now hauls up his signal flags and close also to the shoal notoriously recognised throughout the Submarine Service as "Promotion Point" on which many a renowned submarine captain has enhanced his reputation by running hard and fast aground. The spot has been cursed in more ways than one.

It was here that the body of Jack the Painter (alias James Hill) was hung after he had been convicted of attempting to set fire to Portsmouth Dockyard in 1777, a job which he bungled badly. The skeleton, says Commander Warner in his excellent 'Short History of Fort Blockhouse' remained on show for some considerable period until it was purloined by some more than usually impecunious sailors who used it to wipe out their slate at a local hostelry. One assumes that an enthusiastic young practitioner from Haslar was the purchaser, needing something less formidable than the bodies of healthy stalwart Gosport citizens on which to practise his art. The affair became well known and a jolly little song was written about it, the two verses running:

Fort Blockhouse: Main Gateway

Whose corps by pondrous iron wrung
High upon Blockhouse beach was hung
And long to every tempest swung
Why – truly, Jack the Painter.

Whose bones some years since taken down
Were brought in curious bag to town,
And left in pledge for half-a-crown,
Why – truly Jack the Painter.

The last tennant of the gibbet was a man called Bryan who was executed at Winchester in 1788 and brought for display at Blockhouse dressed in a new black suit, new shoes and ruffles. The chains in which he dangled could well have been of local origin since it was Henry Cort, working on Gosport Green at about that time, who brought to perfection the conversion of pig-iron to malleable iron.

A number of human bones, possibly connected with the gibbet, have been found during various excavations in Fort Blockhouse from time to time. One complete female skeleton which caused particular embarassment was discovered when the (then) strictly bachelor residence of the Commanding Officer at the Fort – "Ivy Cottage" – was pulled down in 1936. Grave doubts were expressed about the private lives of former officers-in-command; but it is now believed that this skeleton was that of a woman who had been privileged to occupy the gibbet at some time during the 18th century. It spoils good gossip but that is the story and everyone concerned is sticking to it.

The year 1859 saw renewed feverish activity in overhauling the defences of the British Isles, particularly around Portsmouth. The Spit, No-man's and Horse-sand Forts sprang up off-shore with, it seems, no very clear purpose in mind. In fact the line of reasoning which led to their construction at the expense of men-of-war was described by one outraged observer as the "lowest ebb of naval thought". (There have, it is said, been other rather low ebbs – some in the not too distant past – in the tides that have swung around and sometimes past Fort Blockhouse.)

By 1879 the value of underwater warfare had begun to be recognised and the Royal Engineers with mines and mining equipment took over Fort Blockhouse as their sea-mining base. New buildings were erected and piers were built along the Creek. It may well have been these jetties that attracted the Admiralty towards taking over Fort Blockhouse as the first "submarine boat station". In 1905 with mining defences at most ports now abolished, Henry Howell, Gunner (T) was appointed to HMS THAMES for duties in Fort Blockhouse and with this appointment the Royal Navy's first submarine base was firmly established.

However, the first Inspecting Captain of Submarines was not entirely happy with the arrangements. The officer to be appointed to that post, later to become Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes, remarked with meaning that it "was unlike anything else in the Navy". Similar comments were to be made during the succeeding 70 years also. "I had an office" said the Admiral, "at the Admiralty and my headquarters were in HMS DOLPHIN, an old hulk secured alongside the submarine depot at Fort Blockhouse and I was nominally in command of HMS MERCURY, a hulk secured head and stern off Haslar Creek. There were seven submarine sections, as they were called in those days, and these were maintained by Fort Blockhouse, which had very primitive living quarters for officers and men, and none of the amenities of a naval barracks although there was a plant for charging submarine batteries, workshops, torpedo stores etc and a floating dock. All officers and Portsmouth ratings were trained there". It sounds a complicated set-up and not entirely happy. But Sir Roger was making the point quite gently in comparison with the views of his contemporaries. It was avowed (probably correctly) that the stables had been turned into officers' quarters and Edwardian officers felt this was not good enough! Submarines at this time were being described, anyway, as "no occupation for a gentleman".

Training at Fort Blockhouse, about 1905

It was not until after the 1914/18 War that Fort Blockhouse saw for the first time an Admiral (S) or as he would now be called a Flag Officer Submarines. Up to 1914 the Fleet in general had regarded submarines as merely "local defence vessels, whose officers and men dressed like North-Sea fishermen and were almost a service apart". However there were a few who had great faith in the new craft. Amongst them were Keyes himself, and towering and all too often glowering over all, Admiral Sir John Fisher. This was the redoubtable Jacky Fisher, who was Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet when the first British submarine was launched and the First Sea Lord thereafter for an exceptionally long period. These two men did much for the underwater service and as time went on it was realised that submarines had far greater potential than simply assisting in harbour defence. Fisher, in particular, realised this in 1904, a year before Blockhouse became the premier submarine base, when he wrote "I don't think it is evenly faintly realised the immense impending revolution which submarines will effect as offensive weapons of war". He went on to say that they were the "battle-ships of the future" and his predictions have been fully proven. Indeed the submarine fleet is the present-day battle-fleet; and a large proportion of it relies upon Gosport's ancient but continually expanding Blockhouse for training and support.

Between the Wars there were only two 12-pounder guns on the ramparts of the Fort: the cannons had long since vanished. This meagre armament was manned by the Royal Artillery but at the outbreak of the Second World War a Beaufors AA gun was added and later still two twin low-angle 6-pounders. A 4-inch submarine gun, normally used only for instructional purposes, was hastily converted to an active weapon of war and two saluting guns were adapted into nuisance weapons by the Engineers' Department. A pom-pom recovered from some long-forgotten scrap-heap in the Dockyard, was mounted below the sub-signal station and a French gun, scrounged from no-one knew where, was established on top of the concrete hutment. Light machine-guns were also placed above various blocks in the establishment, and were manned by Royal Marines. This impressive arsenal was augmented by what was called a Jones-Wise anti-tank gun. This interesting weapon was contrived from a section of metal drain-pipe; it was topped up with suitable shrapnel made up of nails and various other metal bits and pieces and it was fired by hitting a .22 cartridge, stuck in its rear end, with a hammer. There was also a plentiful supply of obsolescent rifles but there were not many people remaining in the Fort who knew how to aim them.

Soon barbed wire started to envelop the perimeter; and after a few unhappy experiments with trenches, walls were raised to protect the few defenders. Trenches were found, by bitter experience, to have the distinct disadvantage of flooding with water at high tide; they exposed the inhabitants of the Fort to a greater risk of drowning than of bombing. Explosive defences were also laid and some huge submarine mines were slung beneath piers and jetties and bridge archways ready to be detonated whenever the Admiral or the Captain thought the right moment had arrived. It is said that the ships' company in 1939 trod delicately, lived agog and refrained from raising false alarms.

Now, in keeping with its ever-increasing importance – again for the nation's defences even if not so obviously and directly as in the past – the place is still expanding. Gosport is (sometimes painfully) aware of it as steam-hammers drive the piles for new buildings on the foreshore and workmen clap brick upon brick for new blocks. Fort Blockhouse is getting bigger. It has grown for five centuries and it is still growing. It grows with Gosport and Gosport grows with it. One, at least to some extent, depends upon the other.

But despite so many changes; despite the alarums and excursions; despite the loss of the moat and the drawbridge and of the three balls and three cannons which used to greet visitors; despite even the absence of Jack the Painter and his chains and the well-dressed Mr. Bryan (dec'd), Fort Blockhouse has not changed its character too much.

As submariners have eagerly and thirstily recited for three-quarters of a century on the final devious approach to Haslar Creek:

"First the Nab,
And then the Warner,
Outer Spit
And Blockhouse Corner".

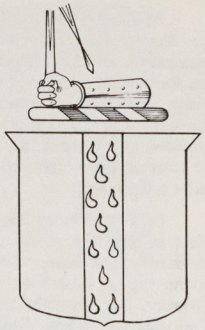
Fort Blockhouse in 1948

Weevil

before the Royal Clarence Yard

by

G. H. Williams



Far to the right, at Weovil we
May view the Naval Brewery,
Where once a spacious mansion stood,
With pleasure ground and garden rood;
But government well liked the lands,
And bought them off the owner's hands;
Sunk the vast Basin, Buildings raised,
And brewed the beer by seamen praised.

Henry Slight, 1820.

Weevil Lane runs from Mumby Road to Forton Lake, with part of St. George Barracks on its left; on its right the Royal Clarence Yard extends to the Harbour. It is often imagined that the name Weevil is derived from that of insects infesting the flour and biscuits in the Yard. Actually, if the insects ever went there, it is a pure coincidence that they went to a district already bearing their name. A chart partly reproduced in Gosport Records No. 7, page 8, and dating from the early or mid 17th century, long before the Yard was there, shows "Weevel Wel Spring" on the site. An account of Portsmouth and Gosport printed in about 1844 states that the land was formerly a farm belonging to a person of the name "Weovill".

The 17th century saw a succession of wars and a great expansion of naval activity in Portsmouth and its Harbour. Moreover during the Civil War Portsmouth was bombarded from Gosport; it was obviously necessary to prevent this from happening again. In 1678 a primitive rampart was built round Gosport, reaching the Harbour at one end in the area of the present rampart near Holy Trinity Church and at the other end in the area of the present Viking Marine. In connection with the construction of this rampart, the Board of Ordnance bought a plot of land near where Haslar Bridge now stands from a John Player *(1)*.

John Player described himself in his will as a distiller, but he had other interests. He owned "messuages, tenements, maulthouses, Brewhouses and stables" in Gosport and lands in Privett. In 1673 he and William Noxon alias Oxford, a shipwright, contracted to supply the Navy with the timber from 470 oak trees at a price of about £1,200 *(2)*. But it is interesting to note that he could not sign his name. He died in 1685 and was buried in Alverstoke churchyard *(3)*. He left most of his property to his "kinsman" Henry Player, who was, or later became, a brewer.

At that time the ships in the Harbour and at Spithead were victualled from Portsmouth, not from Gosport as they are now. A major requirement was beer; the ration was 1 gallon per head per day *(4)*. For supplying it a royal brewhouse had been erected in 1492 *(5)* and by 1525 there were five of these in Portsmouth *(6)*. But by 1711, and probably by a much earlier date, no Government brewery remained in the area *(7)*. In that year the Treasury asked for the opinion of the Navy Victualling Board on whether Portchester Castle should be converted into a brewery; after two of its members had visited Portsmouth to investigate, the Board replied that "Port Chester Castle will appear a very improper place for erecting a Brewhouse" *(8)*. In the meantime the Navy bought its beer from contractors.

The above-mentioned Henry Player, generally known as Captain Player though the nature of his rank is not clear, built a brewery for the supply of beer to the Navy. He built it outside the Gosport rampart, on the edge of the Harbour in the area of the present Royal Clarence Yard. In the prevailing south-west wind the site had a sheltered position on the windward shore, making it convenient for harbour craft under sail. The brewery had a cooperage for making casks and a well, with wind pump, supplying water of good quality for brewing. A horse-driven mill and pump were also installed. For a time the brewery had almost a monopoly in the supply of water to the Navy in the Harbour. Henry Player in addition owned some shipping, including " a great old Dutch man-of-war.....of very little value" *(9)*.

In 1707-9 Henry Player, Thomas Ridge and James Dixon held a contract for the supply of beer to the Navy. But they were then blacklisted by the House of Commons on the ground that, with the connivance of the Victualling Agent, they had obtained "false & fraudulent Certificates or Receipts from the Pursers for beer not delivered by them on board her Majesty's Ships". In the subsequent investigation Ridge and Dixon produced figures, from which it was calculated that the Crown had lost at least £10,000 through their manipulations; but Henry Player had meanwhile died, and his widow, as executor, failed to produce any figures in respect of him *(10)*. In 1734 her own executor had to refund £93 in respect of 30 tons of beer, delivered between 1708 and 1712, which deteriorated within the warranty period *(11)*; quite a time lag!

In 1704 Henry Player built as his own residence a mansion, Weevil House, between his brewery and what is now Weevil Lane. It was a square house of three storeys and basement, built of brick on a Portland stone base. Over the main door, on the west side, his arms were carved in stone. At the middle of the top of each side was a stone balustrade. It was said of the east one, not only that it had a view of Gosport, Portsmouth, the Dockyard and Harbour and Portchester, but also that it "so advantagiously o'relooks the whole Building and Gardens that you may see each servant performe his duty". In the centre of the building was an elaborate cupola, presumably to light a central staircase. The servants' quarters were in a separate block to the north.

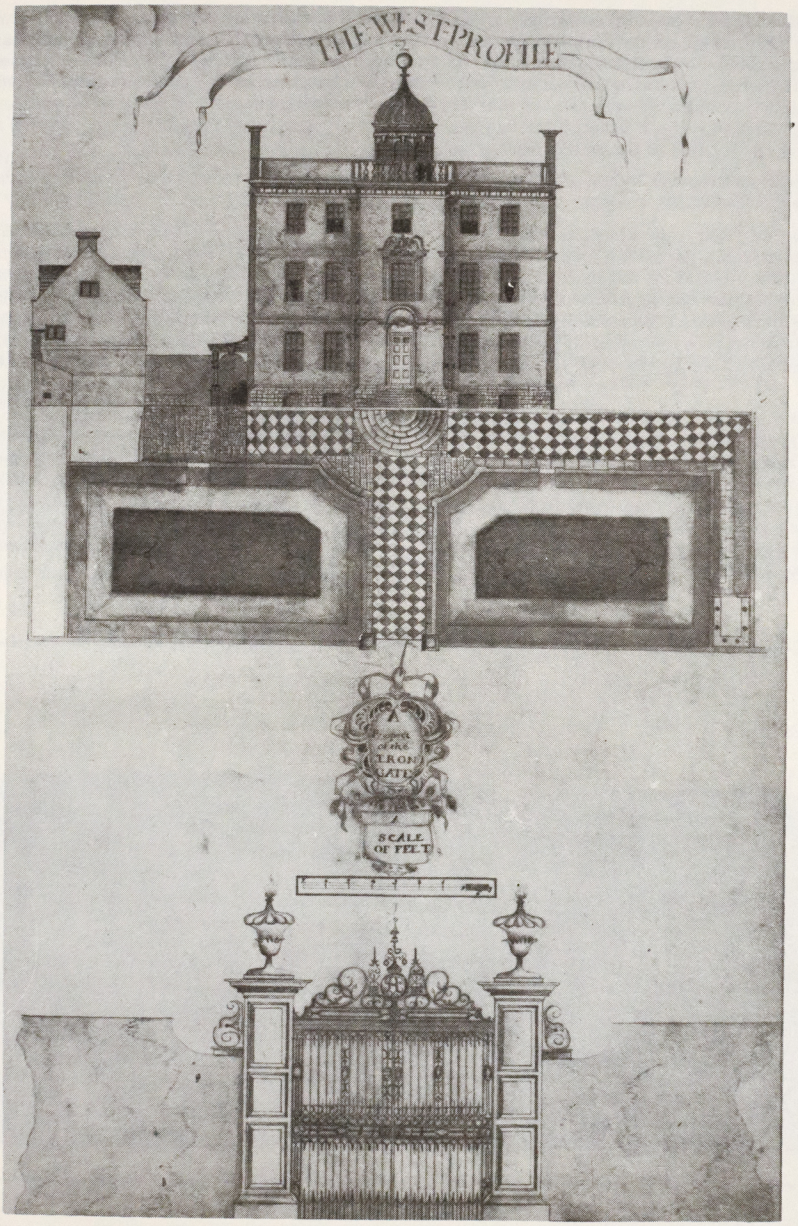
The house was approached through elaborate iron gates hung on Portland stone pillars surmounted by large stone urns from which rose gilt flames. Two-coloured paving stones in a diagonal pattern led to the west door. The garden between the house and brewery contained "Plumbs, Pear's, Grapes, Currants, Cherries, Peachy's, Apricocks, Necteron's.....Holleys, Yews, Filleroys, Lorestina's, Dwarf Box, honeysuckles.....Crownations, Regalesses, Pinks, Polyantesses, Tulips, Junquills, Poyaneys, Annanessesses, Lilies White, Martagin and Irish". To the north, beyond the servants' quarters and a drive leading into the brewery, lay the orchard, "furnisht with all kinds of fruits".

The list of plants would repay study by a botanical historian. One can just recognise Phillyrea and Laurustinus. "Crownation" is probably derived from Coronation, a 16th-century name for Carnation. "Annanessess" is probably a pineapple plant, but these were extremely rare at the time; a pineapple produced at a banquet in Richmond in 1716 was claimed to be the first ever raised in England *(12)*.

The rural seclusion of the landward side of Weevil House was soon threatened. In 1708 there was a proposal to extend the Gosport ramparts northwards by 1,500 yards *(13)*. Soon after this, compulsory purchase of land for the purpose was authorised under two Acts relating to the Portsmouth defences *(14)*. In 1710 the Board of Ordnance purchased from Captain Player about 13 acres of land opposite his house on the landward side of Weevil Lane, and also purchased the land beyond his orchard on the Harbour side *(15)*. But the proposed extension of the rampart was delayed until the late 1750s *(16)*, and in the meantime, Henry Player being dead, the Board leased the land to the Player family trustees *(17)*.

Captain Henry Player had a brother John, from whom were descended the family of Hobbs described in Gosport Records No. 8, pp. 5 & 6. Henry himself appears in our local history in various connections. Partly as a result of the building of the rampart, Gosport formed part of the Borough of Portsmouth from 1682 to 1688 *(18)*. In 1683 a number of the inhabitants of Gosport, including Henry, signed a complaint to the Bishop of Winchester, Lord of the Manor, against the interference of the Portsmouth authorities *(19)*. Henry was a churchwarden of Alverstoke in 1687 *(20)*. In 1694 he took the lead in organising the building of Holy Trinity Church, and the first baptism in its register is that of his son William. He presented a silver flagon (engraved with his arms) to Alverstoke Church, and a silver gilt chalice and paten to the Dock Chapel (the predecessor of St. Anne's); his wife presented a silver flagon to Holy Trinity: all these vessels are still in existence. In an allocation of pews in Alverstoke Church in 1705, Henry was alloted No. 34 in the men's section and his wife No. 19 in the women's section; the sexes were apparently segregated *(21)*. In 1708 the Alverstoke Court Leet appointed as Reeve Henry Stubbington, who was Henry Player's tenant or nominee. (Incidentally, when the Court Leet in 1713 appointed this Henry Stubbington as Constable, Mr. Player of Berry – whoever he may have been – "gave 5s. to wett ye Staff".)

In view of his interest in Holy Trinity, an incident in 1694 is rather surprising *(22)*. A water main was to be laid from a well in Forton to Gosport. 83 of the inhabitants consented in consideration of the payment, by the developer, of £10 towards the building of Holy Trinity. But Henry Player and five other freeholders consented in consideration of £1 being spent on a treat to them at the Ship-on-Wheels. (This was in Forton, and may be the first public house in the district now on record. In 1685 it belonged to a George Berry *(23)*.)



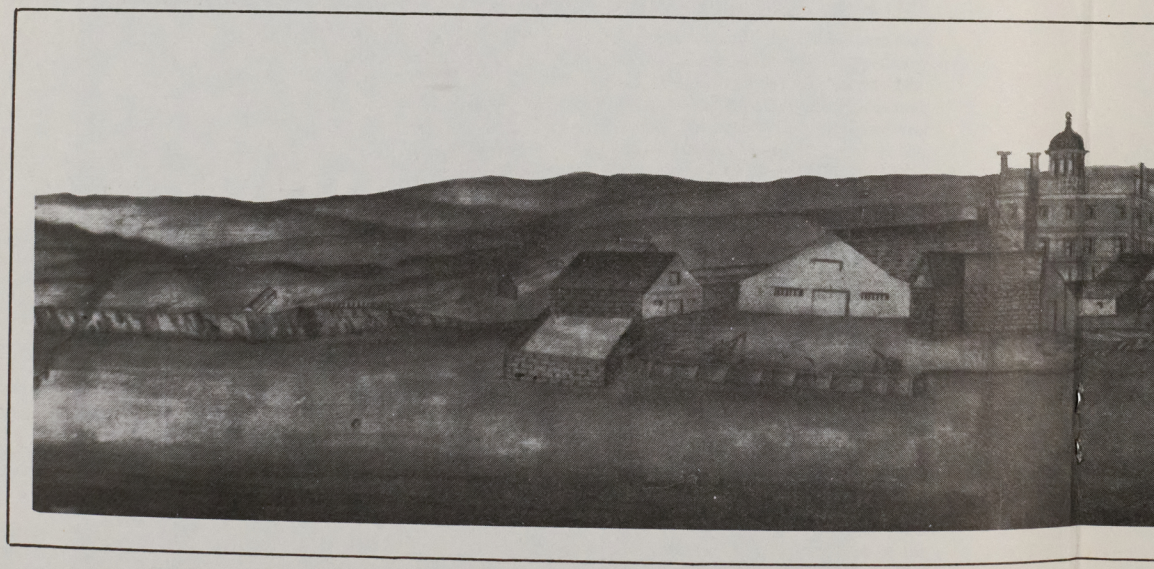
Weevil House: The West Profile and Gates

Henry Player invested extensively in land. In his will he refers not only to the Weevil estate itself but also to the following property, much of which he says that he had bought: dwelling-houses and coach-house in Gosport and Fortune; lands called the Sea Grounds; the Half-way House; five closes on either side of the lane leading to Berry; a coppice in Woodcott Ranke; a brewhouse and ground at Stokes Bay; the manor of Ryde and considerable property in the Isle of Wight; and property in Fareham and Waltham. The Sea Grounds appear to have been in the neighbourhood of the present Walpole Park *(24)* and the Half-way House in the position of the present White Hart *(25)*.

Henry Player was buried on 29 March 1711 in Alverstoke Church in a vault "at the uper end of the Chancell" *(26)*.

By his first wife Elizabeth Capt. Henry Player had five sons and one daughter, all baptised at Alverstoke in the period 1674-89 (in addition to a son who died in infancy). John, the eldest, died in his father's lifetime and his descendants moved away from Hampshire. Thomas was living in Gosport in 1705 when he buried a son in Alverstoke churchyard *(27)*, but he later inherited the manor of Ryde and divided his attention between London, Ryde and Fareham; following his father's example, he built the first church in Ryde, appropriately named St. Thomas's *(28)*. Henry *(29)*, Charles and Giles appear to have died without issue; Charles had literally been cut off with a shilling in his father's will. Elizabeth married twice and had issue.

We are more concerned with Capt. Player's second wife Joanna and his two daughters by her, Anne and Joanna. (The above-mentioned son William probably died young.) Henry Player left the Weevil estate and a good deal of his other property in the Gosport and Fareham areas to his wife Joanna, subject to the proviso that she should leave them to such of his children or their issue as she thought fit. She had by 1716 married a second husband by the name of Oakes. At the time of her death in 1732 she was again a widow and was living at Weevil House. She was buried at Alverstoke. She left the Weevil estate and various property in Gosport, Fortune and Fareham in trust for her two daughters; if Anne wished to live in Weevil House she was to have priority.



The Prospect of Weevil

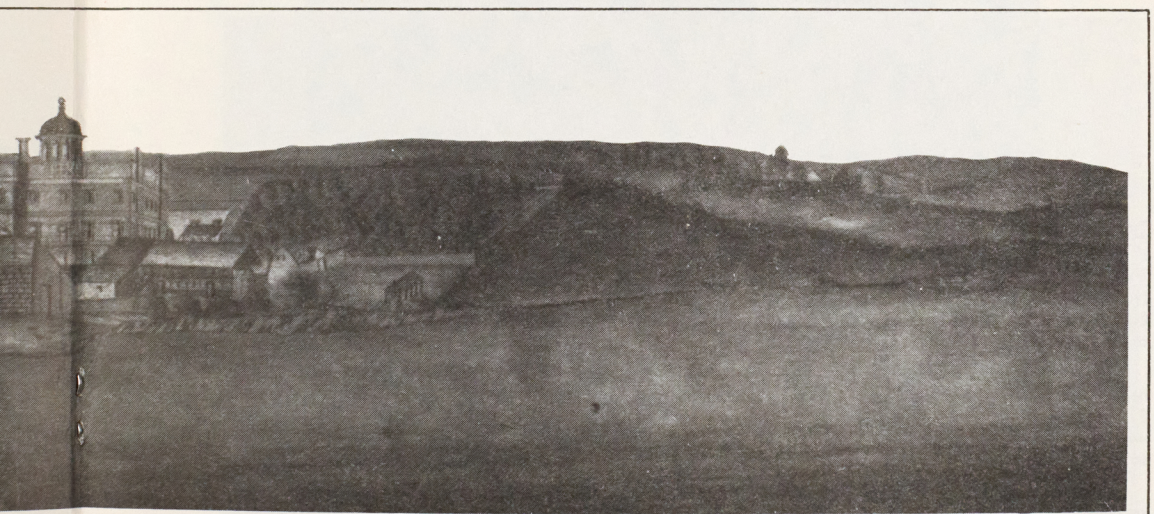
Weevil House is shown on a well-known picture *(30)* of Portsmouth and Gosport in the reign of Queen Anne (partly reproduced on the cover of my Earlier Fortifications of Gosport; the house is marked M). It is described on the picture as "Capn. Flyers House". This is clearly a mistake for "Capn. Player's House". Henry Slight's History of Portsmouth, 1838, refers to a "Captain Flyers" in a confused account of the early history of Weevil, but this seems to be merely a repetition of the mistake made on the picture.

Henry and Joanna's daughter Anne was born on 9 January 1695 and baptised at Alverstoke. By December 1710, though aged under 16, she was the wife of Colby Aspley. By 1712 he had taken Henry's place in the Player-Ridge-Dixon brewing consortium mentioned above *(31)*. But he died, and in 1727 Anne married Thomas Holmes at Alverstoke. It seems that Thomas in turn managed the brewery for some time *(32)*.

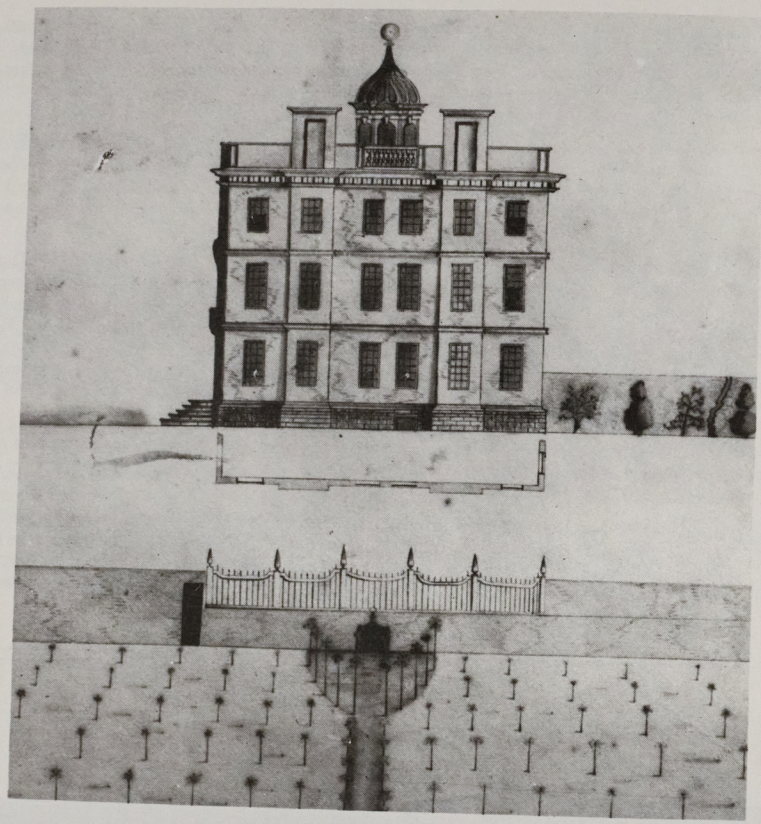
In Yarmouth Church, I.O.W., a curious marble statue has the head of Thomas's grandfather Admiral Sir Robert Holmes and is said to have the body of Louis XIV; the story is that Sir Robert captured the sculptor with the unfinished statue at sea and made him carve his head on it. Sir Robert had an illegitimate daughter, and left most of his property to a nephew on condition that he married her. Thomas Holmes was a son of this marriage. He was M.P. for Newtown, I.O.W., a very rotten borough, from 1734 to 1741, and for Yarmouth from 1747 to his death in 1764. In 1760 he was created Baron Holmes of Kilmallock, but his peerage, being Irish, did not prevent him from sitting in the House of Commons. In 1764 he rebuilt Yarmouth Town Hall, as recorded in an inscription there *(33)*.

Thomas and Anne Holmes were living at Weevil House when she died. She was buried in her father's vault on 29 September 1743 *(34)*. She had no children, and left her half-share in the property in Gosport and Alverstoke, presumably including Weevil, to her sister Joanna.

Joanna, the younger daughter of Henry and Joanna Player, was baptised at Holy Trinity on 26 January 1698. By 1732 she had married Robert Maccarthy, known as Lord Muskerry. His father, the 4th Earl of Clancarty, forfeited his peerage and estates as the result of his adherence to James II; but the family continued to use their titles, and after the father's death in 1734 Robert and Joanna were known as Earl



taken from the top of James Fort



Weevil House: The South Profile

and Countess of Clancarty. Robert was addicted to drink: during a nocturnal debauchery in his early life the Duke of Wharton threw a bottle of claret at him and he lost the sight of one eye *(35)*; in 1735 Lord Tyrawley wrote that he "is a brute beast, and has been drunk the 24 hours round, now this week and more". Nevertheless, he became Captain, RN, in 1722, held several commands afloat, and was Governor of Newfoundland in 1733-35 *(36)*. In or soon after 1741 he emigrated to France, where he lived as a Jacobite exile till his death in 1769.

Weevil Brewery was extended in 1752-3 and 1756-7 *(37)*. But it is not clear whether the Countess of Clancarty, or anyone else, lived in Weevil House after she had inherited her sister's half-share in it in 1743. The Earl lived in France, and she was living in Westminster when she died. She was buried in her father's vault on 24 January 1759. She had no children, and left most of her property, including Weevil House, to four friends, the Earls of Arran and Litchfield, Thomas Cholmondley and Charlotte Kempthorne.

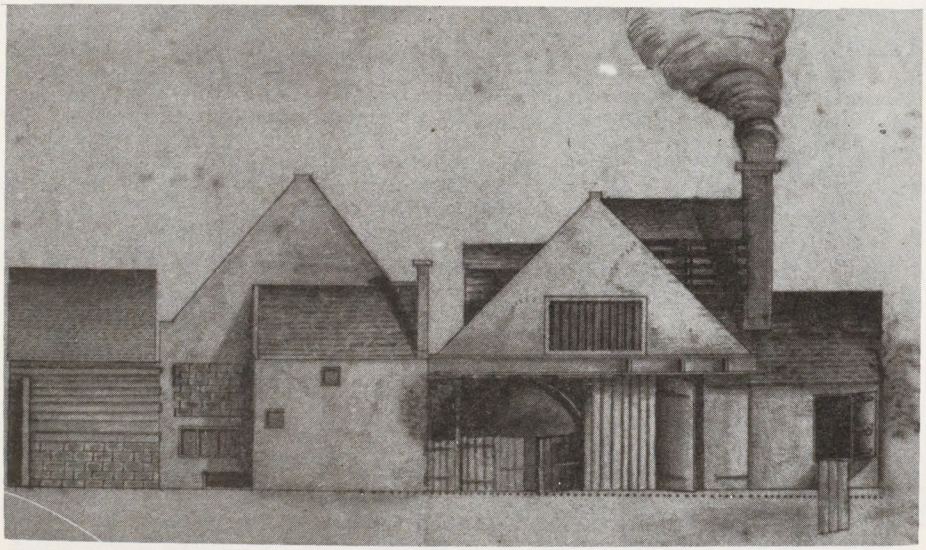
In 1761 the Admiralty bought the Weevil estate for only £1,500 from Lord Holmes, John Eames and others *(38)*. The estate had been held in trust for Anne Holmes and the Countess and there had been recent Chancery proceedings· it seems probable that Lord Holmes and John Eames were the final trustees, though further research *(39)* would be needed to establish this. There is a monument to John Eames in the south aisle of Alverstoke Church; a barrister, he had become Recorder of Portsmouth in 1760 and later became a Master in the Court of Chancery and an M.P.

It seems probable that the Admiralty soon demolished Weevil House. It appears in a map of 1758 *(40)*, but not in a map of 1773 *(41)* or a guidebook of 1775 *(42)*. There was no longer a rich brewer requiring a mansion alongside his brewery. The house may have been empty for some time and out of repair, and it was sandwiched between an expanding brewery on one side and a new rampart on the other.

The Admiralty continued to operate, and even expanded, the brewery, and George III visited it in 1773 and 1778 *(43)*. A French spy in 1768 described it as a Royal Brewery where beer was made for the Services *(44)*. In 1828 victualling was transferred from Portsmouth to the Weevil estate; this, with an extension to the north on land taken over from the Board of Ordnance, became the Royal Clarence Yard. Rum gradually replaced beer as a ration item, and the brewery closed before World War I. But the cooperage continued till the abolition of the rum ration in 1970; though its position had been changed since Henry Player established it in about 1700, the cooperage provided a remarkable example of industrial continuity.

Sources

The article uses the modern system of dating, with the year begining 1 January, not 25 March. The illustrations are reproduced by courtesy of the Bodleian Library from MS Gough Misc. Antiq. 2, a survey of Weevil in 1716. The main sources are: this MS; Alverstoke and Holy Trinity parish registers; W. Berry, Hampshire Pedigrees, 1833, pp. 158, 159; Dictionary of National Biography; Vicary Gibbs, Complete Peerage; Burke's Extinct Peerage; Vict. Co. History of Hants. V, pp. 178, 181, 286, 288, 388; the wills of William Noxon alias Oxford and John Player proved Alverstoke Peculiar 1685 and 24 March 1685/6 respectively; and those of Henry Player, Joanna Oakes, Anne Holmes and Countess Clancarty proved PCC 17 August 1711, 6 March 1732/3 (and again 13 July 1733), 29 October 1743 and 6 April 1759 respectively.



The Brewhouse

Particular sources are as follows:-

(1) Public Record Office MPE 514. (2) PRO SP. 46/137 Part 9 fo. 799. (3) Sexton's register of sites of graves 1736-62 p.188. (4) Peter Kemp, The British Sailor, 1970, p. 37. (5) PRO E. 101/516/23 fo.5v. (6) Vict. Co. History of Hants. III, p. 174. (7) PRO ADM. 110/6 p. 11. (8) PRO ADM. 110/5 pp. 340, 448, 449; T1/147(50), 151(22). (9) MSS of House of Lords, VIII (New Series) p. 64. (10) PRO ADM. 110/6 pp. 11, 27, 283-285, 288. (11) PRO ADM. 110/11 p. 167. (12) Dict. Nat. Biog., Sir Matthew Decker. (13) PRO WO. 55/1548(10). (14) 7 Anne cap. 26 & 8 Anne cap. 21. (15) Portsmouth District Library, S.B. Howlett, WD Land at Gosport, 1861, para. 11 & Plans D & F. (16) See the author's Earlier Fortifications of Gosport, 1974, pp. 40-42. (17) PRO MPE 386. (18) Gosport Records No. 5 pp. 18-21. (19) Brit. Library MS ADD. 33278 ff. 54, 55. (20) Vestry Minute Book 1683-1725. (21) Churchwarden's Accounts 1701-71. (22) MSS of House of Lords, III (NS) p. 172. (23) Typescript by M. M. Palmer, Story of St. Mary's (RC Church), in the Society's Collection. (24) PRO MPE 514. (25) Hampshire Record Office 48 M 74/E/T 165, 166, 167. (26) Register of sites of graves 29 Sept. 1743. (27) ibid. p. 176 and burial register. (28) G.L. Privett, Story of Fareham, 1949, p. 99. (29) "Plear" in baptismal register, but mentioned in will of John 1685/6. (30) Brit. Library K Top XIV 42b; advertised in Evening Post, London, 1 Nov. 1711. (31) PRO ADM. 110/6 p. 11. (32) Henry Slight, History of Portsmouth, 1838. (33) Pennethorne Hughes, The Isle of Wight, 1967, pp. 49, 71. (34) Register of sites of graves. (35) Walker's Hibernian Magazine, Dublin, July 1796, p. 14. (36) J. Charnock, Biographia Navalis, IV, 1796, pp. 97, 98. (37) Henry Slight, op. cit. (38) Defence Land Agent. (39) In Chancery records or the deeds of the Royal Clarence Yard. (40) PRO MPHH 283. (41) British Library K Top XIV 16, Archer. (42) (Lake Taswell) Portsmouth Guide, pub. R. Carr, Portsmouth. (43) W.G. Gates, Illustrated History of Portsmouth, 1960, pp. 450, 452. (44) Portsmouth Central Library, map partly reproduced at Portsmouth Paper 10 p. 4.

The View of the Dockyard c. 1716

H.M.S. Fisgard at Gosport

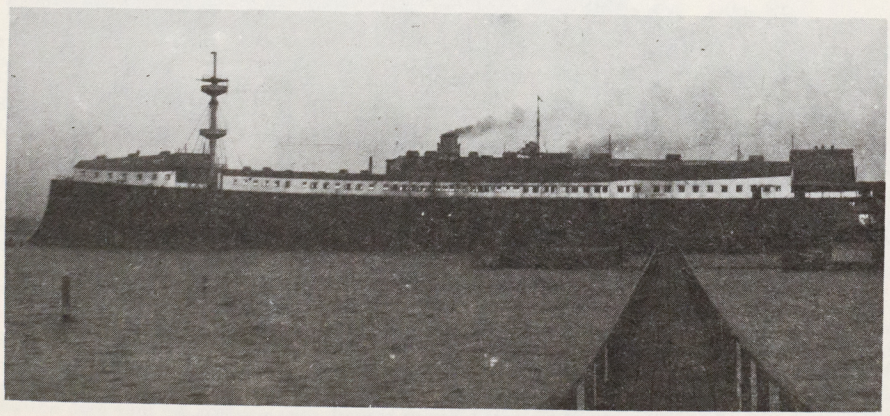
by

Lieut. C. G. Cooper, R.N. (Retd)

Most of the older inhabitants of Gosport will remember the Royal Navy Artificer Apprentices Training Establishment moored off the end of a long pier at Hardway which bore the name H.M.S. Fisgard. They will also recall – with a degree of affection it is hoped – the many young Tiffy Boys once so familiar on the streets of the town. The only visible reminder now left is Fisgard Road, which together with Grove Road connects Hardway to Gosport.

The name Fisgard had an honourable and interesting origin. In February 1798 a small French squadron sailed from Brest on an abortive attempt to invade Britain. The troops they carried were to land and take Bristol. If that failed they were to sail north to destroy Chester and Liverpool and join up with a second invasion which was planned to land at Newcastle. After a series of setbacks the troops were landed at Fishguard on the Welsh coast. They were easily defeated by the local squire and militia. Their ships did not wait to support them but returned to Brest. Here however they ran into two of Lord Bridport's frigates and an action developed. The two French ships were captured: 'La Resistance', mounting 48 guns was only 6 months old, and 'La Constance' with 24 nine pounders on the main deck was two years old. The English ships suffered no casualties but the French had 18 killed, 14 wounded. Thus the invasion attempt was over and the two captured ships added to the Royal Navy. 'La Resistance' was renamed H.M.S. Fisgard in memory of this action, and the name has appeared almost continuously since in the Navy List.

The first Fisgard took part with distinction in many engagements, and in 1807 was flagship of a squadron which captured two Dutch ships and forced the surrender of the Dutch island of Curacao in the West Indies. As a result of this action the Captain of the Fisgard, William Bolton was knighted, and presented with a special sword given by Lloyds Patriotic Fund (1803) awarded for actions of special valour. In 1954 this sword came up for auction, and thanks to the generosity of the then Commander-in-Chief it was purchased from his fund and is now a trophy – of which they are duly proud – in the modern Fisgard.



H.M.S. Fisgard taken off Hardway in 1928
by J. C. Lawrence

Forrard Turnery: Hobbing Machine

Priory Road, opposite which H.M.S. Fisgard was moored

In 1903 Admiral Jackie Fisher, despite much opposition and criticism inside and outside the Service, introduced the scheme for training youngsters as Artificer Apprentices for future duties as Engine Room Artificers. The duties of an E.R.A. extend far beyond an Engine Room: he is responsible for the care, maintenance and running of most of the machinery in a modern warship. To put into action the newly devised training scheme the first establishments were set up as follows:

'Pembroke' in Chatham in 1903, subsequently changed to
'Tenedos' 1 and 2, 1st January 1906.
'Fisgard' in Portsmouth in 1906.
'Indus' in Devenport, first as a Stokers' training ship, but
later for accomodation of Boy Artificers, April 1904.

Towards the end of World War 1 the Chatham establishment was closed, followed by the 'Indus' in August 1922. Thus in 1922 the 'Fisgard', recently moved to Hardway, became the only Artificer Apprentices training base.

Over the course of years there had been several changes in the actual ships used to make up Fisgard, but in 1921 when Fisgard became attached to the land by the pier at Hardway the establishment consisted of:

Fisgard I late 'Spartiate', for the ship's company accomodation,
Fisgard II formerly 'Terrible', the home of the Apprentices
containing their living quarters, studies and
recreation rooms.
Fisgard III formerly 'Hindustan' contained workshops and
Fisgard IV late 'Sultan' also housed workshops.

The Rose and Crown public house, situated a few yards from the shore end of the pier and on the site of which now stands the Jolly Roger, was popularly known as Fisgard V.

A special note about the 'Terrible': naval guns were landed from her during the Boer War to assist in the relief of Ladysmith. It is recorded that her twin reciprocating main engines were the largest to be fitted to any ship. For a time over 1,200 boys were accomodated in her, but later this figure dropped to an average of 700.

Conditions on board were spartan. On the Main Deck the boys had their sea-chests packed closely together in rows running athwartship in four divisions: Rodney, Anson, Benbow and Grenville. On the covered in, one time upper deck, was the mess room, superimposed above the school rooms. Forward, in an uncovered section was the galley, laundry and canteen. The food was more or less adequate but by no means lavish. It was served by naval pensioners known by the horrible name of Gobbies. They were a most patient and tolerant band of men and although at times the provocation must have been great, were never known to retaliate against some of the young ruffians they served.

The Apprentices slept in hammocks slung fore and aft, over their chests and so close together that a small child could have walked across a row from one end to the other without any fear of falling down between the gaps. Shrill whistle calls roused them at 6.30 a.m. and breakfast was half an hour later. Then followed more pipes and the boys trooped across the connecting gangways to the workshops at 7.45 a.m. Supervision and instruction in the various trades were given by pensioner E.R.As. together with a few serving Artificers.

For three of four nights a week the boys attended school from 5 p.m. till 7 p.m. During the first two years the subjects taken were English, Mathematics, Mechanics and Physics. During the final two and a half years Machine Drawing and Marine Engineering in all its forms were taught. The teachers were drawn from various schools in the area and the Naval Dockyard. Failure to pass the examinations at the end of each stage meant being discharged, or at least put back for an extra six months. There was thus considerable incentive to study, and the shining goal for every Apprentice was to Pass Out and become a real E.R.A.

Apart from the very real desire to get to sea in a 'real' ship there was of course the equally strong urge to earn some real money. For the first year an Apprentice's pay was twelve shillings a fortnight, rising to thirty-six shillings during the final year. By the time one had bought a couple of stamps for letters home, a bar of Nutty and two doughnuts on pay day, there was not much left for the remaining thirteen days until the next pay day. During the last twelve months of training they were allowed shore leave on one evening a week. A typical and enjoyable break would include a visit to the Criterion Picture house for three pence, and then three pence worth of chips before returning on board.

There was one fiendish rule that stated that all non-local boys had to go ashore every Sunday afternoon from 2 p.m. till 4 p.m. unless the weather conditions were very bad. What a countless number of unanswered prayers would go up on the Sunday morning that it would pour with rain in the afternoon. If one had a few coppers to spend on a small bag of sweets the ambling through the Gosport streets became a little more bearable. Of course in summer one could relax or maybe sleep in a playing field.

Sport in all its forms played a great part in an Apprentice's life. At one time no less than eleven soccer teams turned out on Saturday to play in the local leagues. When the Reverend Tom Williams, an ex Welsh rugby international, was padre four rugger teams would take to the field too.

Life on board was reasonably happy, without too many cares or worries, until the final few weeks of training. Then each Apprentice of whatever trade he was, Fitter and Turner, Coppersmith, Engine Smith or Boiler Maker was faced with the agony of a written examination on technical subjects and the performance of a Test Job to test one's skill and efficiency in the particular craft chosen. Usually ninety hours was allowed for this latter task. To keep within the time limit meant very hard work with not a moment to lose. After completion, agony and suspense were kept up until the final results were known. Fortunately the failure rate was very low. For the vast majority of boys their sojourn on Fisgard was a happy one. Serious crime was all but non existent and petty offences were very trivial. Deep and lasting friendships were made and a real esprit de corps built up between all who trained in the ship.

Following several different moves H.M.S. Fisgard is now in commission at Torpoint in Cornwall, still training Artificers for the Royal Navy after 73 years. At the same time it is felt that Gosport lost something worth having when Fisgard and its young inhabitants left Hardway in January 1932 and the old ships were towed away to be broken up, or as in the case of Sultan tucked away in Portsmouth Dockyard.

The author acknowledges help received from Captain J. C. Warsop of the present H.M.S. Fisgard, now at Torpoint, Cornwall.

An old print of Hardway Post Office in Priory Road

Forton Barracks

1807 - 1923

by

Dione Venables

One of the regrettable things that the Industrial Revolution did for this country was to blot out so many of our small suburban villages in a blur of red-brick street development. The Gosport area is a prime example, as some half a dozen hamlets within two or three miles of the town walls have been completely swallowed up in the general housing explosion and are now little more than road names on an area map. One of the largest of these 'victims' of our natural expansion is the village of Forton, an area to the north west of Gosport on the main road to Fareham. In the past Forton has contributed greatly to the development of Gosport. Its farmers and millers provided much of the town's fresh produce, and large Admiralty victualling warehouses and storage yards sprung up on the town side of the village during the 18th and 19th centuries. But by far the most important factor in the growth of Forton was the building of the barracks at the begining of the 19th century.

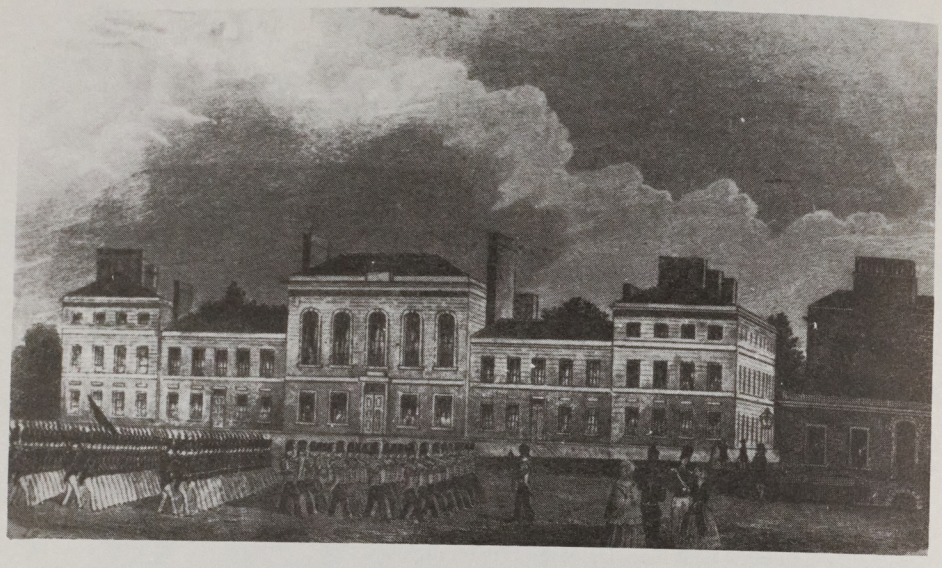
Contrary to some local beliefs, Forton Barracks was not built on the site of the infamous old Fortune Hospital. That unhealthy straggle of wooden huts and unsightly buildings was first erected in 1713 on what was then a low and marshy site where now Lees Lane meets Gordon Road. A merchant called Nathanial Jackson won a contract from the Admiralty Board to provide accommodation and medical facilities for the naval and military sick in the Portsmouth area. Jackson would doubtless be regarded today as a land speculator as he seems to have cut all possible corners, and although he fulfilled his side of the contract in the literal sense, the frugality of the buildings he erected and the pittance he paid both doctors and nursing orderlies was so meagre that the place only attracted the second class members of both professions.

By the middle of the 18th century the Fortune Hospital was occupied by French and later American prisoners of war. An American prisoner's song (extracted from the "Globe and Laurel") has these words:

.....and Fortune's Keep, a dread abode,
Where, neath misfortune's heavy load,
Ambitions' slaves, for despot's crime,
Were captive kept in warlike time.

The Americans were courageous and enterprising men and many of them managed to make their escape, singly or even in large groups. One mass escape involved fifty seven prisoners who tunnelled their way out of prison and disappeared into the countryside. When a fire broke out in the older buildings of the hospital in 1807 it was decided to pull down the whole place.

Matthew Carter was one of the leading citizens of Forton at the end of the 18th century. He owned and worked Forton Mill, the land of which extended down both sides of Forton Creek and across the Fareham Road towards Ann's Hill. With the expansion of Priddy's Hard, the Armament Depot at the mouth of Forton Creek, he began to sell land to the Board of Ordnance, including a piece on the south side of the creek. Upon this land the Board decided to build a new prison hospital in 1796 and soon foundations were laid. However since the new hospital at Haslar was adequately meeting the needs of the area's military sick it was decided that Forton would be better used as a barracks. The architects were instructed to alter their designs to fit the new requirements. An elegant Barracks complex gradually took shape, described in contemporary papers as having "four very lofty pavilions, connected by arcades of great extent with a parade ground of some acres. On the opposite square is the entrance gate with the apartments for officers."



Officer's Mess

The new Barracks was completed in 1807 after more land had been added to it by the Barracks Board. It was soon in use, housing an ever changing stream of infantry and artillery who were manning the area fortifications and running down the prison hulks in Forton Creek. Around the Barracks the village quickly expanded with new shops, beer houses and homes for married personnel. Immediately outside the Main Gate on the Gosport side was the public house called the Forton Arms; it was later pulled down to make way for the new Commandant's house, today known as St. Vincent House. In 1849 a private builder erected a 'gentleman's residence' next door to the Commandant's house. History does not relate who the gentleman was, but within a year it was bought by the Barrack Board for use as the residence of the Second in Command of the Barracks. Strangely, it retained its homely name of Cedar Cottage and is to be seen today, unaltered and very pleasing in design, still surrounded by its original garden and boundary walls.

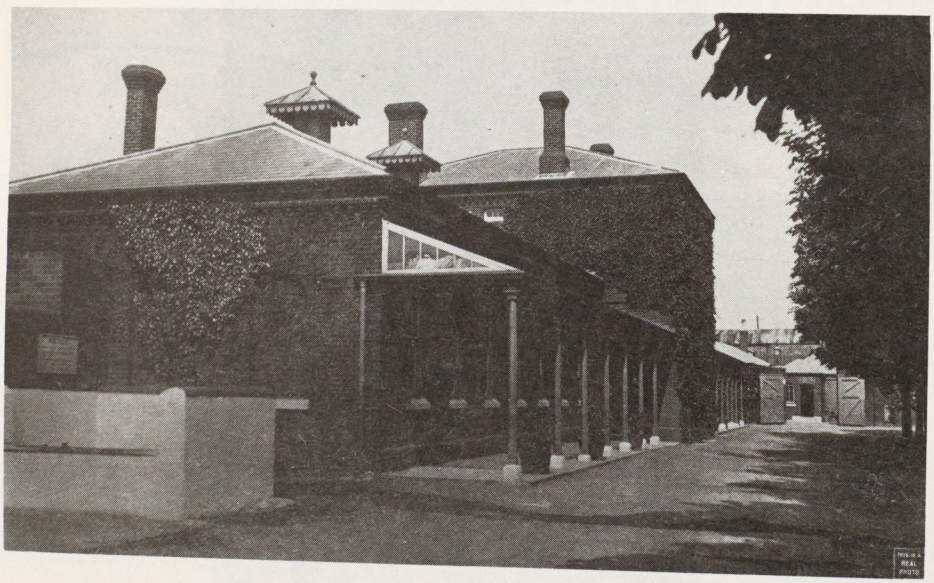
In Portsmouth, in the early 1800's, the Royal Marines were expanding fast and it became necessary for them to move from Clarence Barracks which had been their home since 1765. Accordingly, the Boards of Admiralty and Ordnance agreed to a 'swop', and the Red Marines – as the Royal Marine Light Infantry was known – moved over to Forton on 29th March 1848. It is said that the last unit to leave Clarence Barracks decided to take a souvenir over the water with them. The clock was smuggled across and eventually erected over the Main Gate where it still gives us the time of day. The story led to a Royal Marine tradition – "The last man out takes the clock".
(N.B. The clock was made by Gillette and Johnson of Clerkenwell whose early records no longer exist but a recent careful examination of this clock indicates that it was probably not made before 1860).

From 1848 the Barracks grew steadily and contributed to the improvement of the village and its inhabitants. A small school was opened for the children of married Marines and its bricked up doorway can still be seen at the end of the main facade where Mill Lane joins Fareham road. The little school was twenty years ahead of its time since compulsory Elementary Education was not made law until 1870. It was to prove so popular that it outgrew the first premises and in 1891 moved further down the Mill Lane side of the Barracks to a new building with better facilities. By this time, the playing fields opposite the Main Gate had been purchased and more land along the Mill Lake, including the little spit of land used during the Napoleonic Wars for the burial of prisoners of war. Part of the foreshore was reclaimed and towards the end of the 1880's the first open air swimming pool was built. The actual Mill Pond was

bought from the Bishop of Winchester in 1858 with the remaining stretch of marshy waterway which wound its way inland almost as far as Anns Hill. The area was gradually dredged and utilised as allotments and building land. By 1893 a theatre seating 600 had been added to the many amenities of the Barracks. The building, beside the rear Main Gate, also housed a concert room and gymnasium. It cannot have been a particularly elegant place. It is described in a contemporary edition of the "Globe and Laurel" as having "three sides of corrugated iron, lined with matchwood boarding and the fourth side of brick – being the boundary wall of the Barracks and road". However, the Forton Theatrical Society was created here and gave fortnightly performances throughout the season for the troops and the public.

One feature that the Barracks was certainly very proud of was its parade ground. At one time it is believed to have been the largest in the country, and the accoustic problems ensured that the Royal Marine N.C.O's had particularly well-developed lungs. Another addition of great value to the whole community was the building in 1898 of a Cottage Hospital beside the Drill Field and near the old Windmill Public House. It was a compact two storey building containing surgeries and two six bedded wards. This enabled the old sick quarters to be made into a surgery for women and children.

Over the years the Forton Barracks had become the main Royal Marines Depot for musketry training as well as for music. Extensive ranges were established at Browndown which were further improved when the Magazine Rifle was introduced. Annual Contests were held there, attracting divisions from as far away as Plymouth. Strangely the Barracks never felt it necessary to build its own church. There are several memorial tablets dedicated to the memory of Marines in the Church of Saint John the Evangelist, Forton, but it was always the Parish Church first and the Garrison Church second. The first Forton church, completed in 1831, was replaced by the present rather martial building in 1892.



Men's Canteen

During those thriving and colourful Victorian years, most of the money available to the Barracks Board was used to improve and extend the facilities for the Red Marines and not enough was being conserved for the necessary every day maintenance of the buildings and surrounding land. The result was that by the time the Royal Marine Light Infantry and the Royal Marine Artillery were amalgamated in 1923 the whole place was in desperate need of basic repair which would have cost an estimated £60,000. This enormous sum was too large for the Admiralty to consider and so the Portsmouth Division of the Royal Marines moved back across the water, this time to enjoy the bracing air of Eastney. On 29th July 1923 the Adjutant General, Sir H. E. Blumberg took the last Church Parade and on 1st August the Colours were transferred to Eastney. The Clock stayed in its bell tower over the Main Gate but instead the Division took with it many of Forton's sons.

It is hoped to conclude the story of Forton Barracks, Saint Vincent then and now, in a later edition of 'Gosport Records'.

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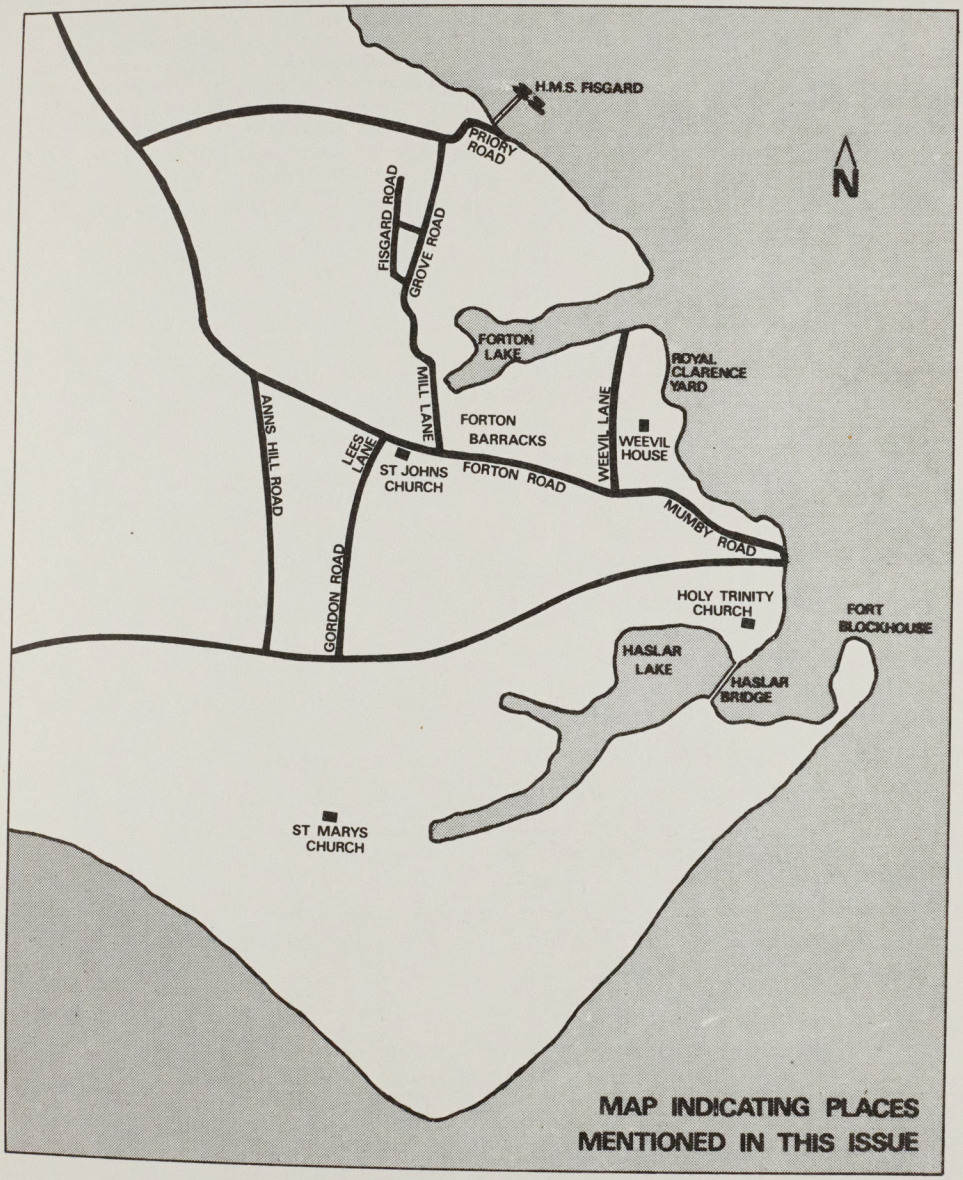
(1) *The Globe and Laurel – the journal of the Royal Marines.*
(2) *Historical Review of the Royal Marine Corps by A. Gillespie 1803.*
(3) *Historical Record of the Royal Marine Forces by P.H. Nicholas 2vv 1845.*
(4) *Britains Sea Soldiers by C. Field 2vv 1924.*

The Main Gateway in Forton Road



MAP INDICATING PLACES MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE