

Gunwharf Quays and Portsmouth Historic Dockyard Audio Walk

This walk is about Gunwharf quays and Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. The walk starts at the junction of Park Road and Saint Georges Road at the entrance to Gunwharf Quays. You should be standing alongside an old wall next to Vernon Gate which is at the traffic light junction of Park Road and Saint Georges Road.

Gunwharf Quays is situated at the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour between Old Portsmouth and Portsmouth's Historic Dockyard. The land Gunwharf Quays has been built on is steeped in history. The site has had a varied historical background with the site being used to defend Portsmouth as far back as 1526. The Gunwharf site has been incrementally reclaimed from the sea as time has passed.

The site which Gunwharf quays is built upon was the first main ordnance yard for the Royal Navy and was established in the late 17th century. Nelson's Gate which was built in 1803 has been retained as part of Gunwharf Quays and so too has some of the original boundary wall.

You should be able to see the original boundary wall next to where you are standing along with Vernon Gate.

In 1891 the Royal Marines vacated their barracks on the site and in 1919 the Naval Ordnance Department too vacated the land, at this point the land was taken over by the Naval Torpedo School and was named HMS Vernon. HMS Vernon was the centre for development and training of the art of torpedoes. HMS Vernon become famous for its clearance diving team and deep diving trials unit.

Buster Crabb served at HMS Vernon and was a clearance diver who was working for MI5 when he disappeared after diving on two Russian warships moored in Portsmouth in 1956. After a long life HMS Vernon closed in 1986.

In 1996 a planning brief was created for the development of Gunwharf Quays into what we have today. Gunwharf Quays today offers retail, leisure and residential facilities.

Work on creating the Gunwharf Quays we have today started in 1998 and was completed in February 2001.

Gunwharf Quays occupies a 33 acre site of over 65 shopping outlets, 20 bars and restaurants, an 11 screen cinema, a 26 lane bowling complex, 310 homes, ship births and office space. The development has a 1,450 space car park situated under the development and has recently had the addition of a 130 bedroom hotel.

Retail names include those of Paul Smith, Ralph Lauren, French Connection, Gap, Nike, Levi's and Adidas.

Now walk in through Vernon gate into Gunwharf Quays. You will pass the former Lodge on your right. Walk on into Gunwharf's Shopping complex and head for Caen Marche, this will lead you into Central Square from where you need to turn left. Keep the shops on your left and follow them round past Ralph Lauren until a walkway appears on your left. Walk down this walkway and you will be on the waterfront with

the spinnaker tower to your right and ships straight ahead. There are some concrete seats here so why not take a seat. Now press pause until you reach the waterfront.

Now look towards the Spinnaker Tower. The spinnaker tower is situated at the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour within the Gunwharf Quays development. It is 170 metres tall and consists of three viewing decks the bottom of which has a section of glass floor. On a clear day you can see for 23 miles. The high-speed lift will whisk you to the top of the tower at a speed of 4 metres per second, taking just 30 seconds to reach the top of the tower.

The Spinnaker tower was opened to the public in October 2005 and the towers distinct design can be seen for miles around and at night the tower is illuminated.

The towers first illumination was coincided to take place as part of the Trafalgar 200 celebration on the 28th June 2005. The tower is built in the sea and employed many state of the art engineering techniques to construct it. The tower offers viewing decks at 100m, 105m and 110m and is two and a half times the height of Nelson's column.

The design is of a sail billowing in the wind. Work began on the tower in 2001 with it slowly growing over the years until in October 2005 it was opened to the public and cost a total of over £35 million to build.

If you have got time why not take a trip up the Spinnaker Tower and get some spectacular views across the harbour and beyond. If you do decide to go up the tower please pause the audio now and return to this seat before resuming.

Now walk back into the shopping complex through the walkway you exited through. Walk straight ahead this time through central square and straight on past some more shops. You will then cross over a zebra crossing before going under the railway line. Upon exiting from the archway under the railway turn left and follow the pavement round into the hard area of Portsmouth. Cross over the road leading to Portsmouth Harbour train station and then after a few shops cross over again. You will then be able to see the historic dockyard ahead of you and to your left you will be able to see HMS Warrior. When you get to this point please resume the audio.

Look toward HMS Warrior on your left. Behind HMS Warrior is Portsmouth Harbour and slightly obscured by the train station is the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour and the Solent.

Portsmouth harbour is located on the west side of Portsmouth and with a narrow harbour entrance of only 200 yards provides a safe and defensible harbour for shipping. The first to recognise the importance of Portsmouth's potential as a port for shipping was Marcus Aurelius Carausius who in approximately 285AD commissioned Portchester Castle to be built at the top of the harbour to repel attacks harrying trade with Rome.

In 1495 King Henry VII built the world's first dry dock in Portsmouth. During subsequent years the Royal Navy grew and so too did Portsmouth's dockyard. With the increase in size of the dockyard and the fleet Portsmouth became vulnerable to attack and hence fortifications were built these included the Round Tower, Square

Tower and Southsea Castle. Regular wars with the French in the 18th century meant the dockyard flourished.

Portsmouth Harbour is a lively waterway with Gosport on one side and Portsmouth on the other. At the top of the harbour is Portchester castle and Portsdown hill. The harbour not only caters for the Royal Navy but also has a thriving commercial ferry port with ferries serving many places including Spain and France.

On the Gosport side of the harbour Hasler Marina is home to many smaller pleasure craft of varying types and sizes.

As you leave Portsmouth Harbours mouth you emerge into the Solent which is a busy shipping water way. On a clear day you can see across the Solent to the Isle of Wight. You may also notice four forts within the solent these are Horse Sands Fort, No Mans Land Fort, St Helens Fort and Spitbank Fort. All were designed in the 1860's to protect Portsmouth against a suspected invasion but were in fact never needed.

The royal naval base located within Portsmouth Harbour is nearly 300 acres in size with three miles of waterfront. Portsmouth Harbour sees around 35 continental ferry movements per day as well as all the naval and pleasure crafts. Portsmouth is home to 60% of the Royal Navy's surface fleet. This leads us on to Portsmouth's Naval Base and historic dockyard.

Now walk towards the main gate of Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. Go inside the dockyard and find a convenient place to stop somewhere near the visitor centre on your left.

Portsmouth's Dockyard is located on the west side of Portsmouth. Portsmouth is home, as previously mentioned, to 60% of the Royal Navy's surface fleet of ships. The Royal Naval base is 300 acres in size and consists of 62 acres of basins and 15 working dry docks. The historic dockyard is located within the Royal Naval base and includes HMS Victory, the Mary Rose, HMS Warrior, the Royal Naval Museum, Action Stations and many other exhibits.

As with most of Portsmouth the dockyard has a history and a story to tell. In 1194 King Richard I granted Portsmouth its first Royal Charter and also ordered the construction of a dockyard. In 1495 King Henry VII ordered the construction of the world's first dry dock in Portsmouth and in 1670 Charles II created the Royal Navy and granted Portsmouth the status of Royal Dockyard.

Between 1750 and 1850 Portsmouth's dockyard was at its peak due to the continuous wars. During this period the dockyards storehouses, residences and rope house were built. In 1802 the block mills were opened, this was a factory that mass-produced ship pulley blocks. The block mills used machinery designed by Marc Brunel.

During the Second World War Portsmouth became the target of bombing attacks due to its significance of being home to the Royal Navy. In 1984 the Royal Dockyard lost the title of Royal Dockyard and was to be known as a naval base.

If you walk on a bit and look to your left you will be able to see HMS Warrior. When you are able to see HMS Warrior please resume the audio.

We now move on to HMS Warrior, which is also located within the historic dockyard, and was the first ironclad warship. HMS Warrior was launched on 29th December 1860 and commissioned for service on 1st August 1861. In June 1862 she started active service as part of the Channel Squadron patrolling coastal waters and sailing to Lisbon and Gibraltar.

HMS Warrior has never fired a shot in anger, her strength enabled her to keep peace without ever having to fire a shot. Within a decade Warrior was obsolete and was relegated to the reserve fleet and in 1883 was withdrawn from sea service. Her masts and guns were stripped and she became a depot ship for two years.

In 1903 her name was changed to Vernon III and joined HMS Vernon the Navy's torpedo training school. Her role was to supply steam and electricity to the other hulks. In 1924 Warrior went up for sale. But no one wanted to buy her. In 1929 she became Oil Fuel Hulk C77 and became a floating oil jetty in Pembroke Dock in Wales.

In 1979 the Warrior's Trust took charge of her and it hoped to restore her into a national treasure. She went into Grey's Shipyard in Hartlepool where she underwent £8m of work before returning to Portsmouth in 1987.

HMS Warrior is moored within Portsmouth's Historic Dockyard, her vital statistics are: she is 128m long, weighs 9,210 tons and could reach speeds of 13 knots under sail or 14.5 knots under steam power. She had a total compliment of 705 men.

Warrior is open to the public and is also available to be hired for corporate events or weddings and could be the perfect backdrop to a special day. During the past year over 80 weddings have been held on board HMS Warrior.

Now follow the main road further on into the dockyard until you reach some picnic tables on your left and then resume the audio.

You are now next to part of the Royal Naval Museum and opposite Boat House number 7.

We now move on to the Royal Naval Museum. The Royal Naval Museum is located within a number of historic buildings within Portsmouth's Historic Dockyard. Storehouse No11 was built from 1763 onwards and is used to store many of the galleries of the Museum. The Royal Naval Museum was founded in 1911. During the 19th century HMS Victory was moored in Portsmouth Harbour and visitors were allowed aboard and they could also view a small Nelson collection.

The small Nelson museum was moved ashore to a specially built museum in the dockyard that was completed in 1938. This building was called the Victory building and was on the site of an old rigging house opposite HMS Victory.

The museum consists of a victory gallery, sailing navy gallery, nelson gallery, twentieth century gallery and also many temporary exhibitions. The Victory gallery tells the story of the ship and the people who served in her. It contains a multi-media experience allowing you to experience the Briefing Room, Gun Deck and Cockpit. The gallery also contains Victory's original figurehead, information about restoring Victory and the royal barge used in Nelson's funeral.

The sailing Navy Gallery which is located within the storehouse and includes an interactive computer exhibit, health issues of the Royal Navy, hand to hand fighting and portraits of naval officers. The Nelson gallery contains artefacts relating to Nelson including a Nelson Figure, Nelsons story and portraits.

The Twentieth Century gallery includes the Second World War at Sea, the forgotten fleet, women at sea, combat at sea and the reserves.

When you are ready walk on further into the dockyard keeping the Royal Naval Museum on your left you will cross over a road. As you do so look to your left and you will see the semaphore tower. Carry on walking and you will be able to see HMS Victory ahead and to the right of you. When you reach HMS Victory find a convenient place to stop and then resume the audio.

Portsmouth's historic dockyard is home to Nelson's HMS Victory. HMS Victory is still a commissioned war ship, which makes it the world's oldest commissioned warship. HMS Victory is located within dry dock number 2 and was built between 1759 and 1765 and was a first-rate ship of the line. HMS Victory is probably best known for its Vice Admiral Lord Nelson and its part in the battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

HMS Victory with Vice Admiral Lord Nelson on board led 27 British ships into battle off Cape Trafalgar against the French and Spanish fleet. At this battle the British won a great victory but Nelson paid the ultimate price with his life.

HMS Victory is open to the public and tours of the ship will take in the great cabin, the spot where Nelson died and the gun decks where 800 men lived and worked. In 2005 Portsmouth saw events marking the 200th anniversary of the battle of Trafalgar. HMS Victory played a key roll in the anniversary with a full broad side being fired from the ship in October as part of an event witnessed by Her Majesty the Queen.

HMS Victory is currently a museum but also is the flagship of the Second Sea Lord. In 1812 HMS Victory was retired from frontline duty and anchored in the harbour. She spent the next 110 years at her moorings within Portsmouth Harbour until 1922 when she was moved into the dockyard and placed in No2 dry dock. At this point work began on her to bring her back to her original 1805 condition.

Now for a few facts about Victory. HMS Victory carried 100 guns and a crew of over 800 men and was one of the largest warships of her time. Victory took approximately 6,000 tress to build her and cost £63,175 which would be approximately £50 million in today's money, to build. Victory is 69.34m long with the main mast being 62.50m from the waterline and she displaced 3,556 tonnes.

Now if you walk towards the back of HMS Victory you will see a narrow walkway that will take you round the back of the ship and over the mouth of the dry dock. Walk over this walkway and then turn to your left and find a convenient place to stop. You will be next to the Mary Rose Ship Hall. When you are here resume the audio.

We now move on to the Mary Rose Henry VIII war ship, which is also located within the historic dockyard. The Mary Rose is a 16th century warship and is the only ship of its type on display anywhere in the world. The Mary Rose was built between 1509 and 1511 and was one of the first ships capable of firing a broadside and is believed to be one of King Henry VIII's favourite ships. The Mary Rose served her country for many years until 19th July 1545 when she sank off of Southsea Castle.

In July 1545 the French fleet entered the Solent with the intention of invading the Isle Of Wight and destroying the English fleet. The French fleet consisted of 200 sail including 23 galleys compared to the English fleet of 80 ships, which gathered in Portsmouth with more expected from the West Country.

Sir Peter Carew, who was the brother of the Vice Admiral on the Mary Rose, said that the Mary Rose began to heel as soon as the sails were raised. The Mary Rose website says that there have been a number of attempts to explain the loss of the Mary Rose, none of them entirely satisfactory. Some people have attributed the ship's loss to the gun ports being too close to the water line. But whatever the reason she sank.

In 1967 the Mary Rose committee was formed and they then sought proof that an anomaly on the sea bed was indeed the Mary Rose. In the winter of 1968 they confirmed the existence of something solid under the silt. On 5th May 1971 Percy Ackland discovered three of the port frames of the Mary Rose and in 1979 the Mary Rose Trust was formed with His Royal Highness Prince Charles as its president.

The remains of the Mary Rose's hull was raised to the surface on 11th October 1982 and towed into Portsmouth Harbour. She was moved into dry-dock no 3 on 8th December 1982. Work then started on constructing a ship hall for the ship. Conservation work on the Mary Rose continues to this day.

The Mary Rose ship hall is open to the public along with a museum depicting the raising of the Mary Rose and also many of the recovered artefacts from the ship. The Mary Rose was 32m in length and was rated 700 tons in 1512.

When you are ready walk towards the front of HMS Victory and then turn to your right you will see the Royal Naval Museum ahead of you. Now follow the road back towards the entrance to the historic dockyard past the picnic tables where you stopped on the way in. This time cross to the left side of the road and next to boathouse no 7 is the mill pond. Stop here and look towards action stations which is housed in boathouse number 6. When you reach this point please resume the audio.

Portsmouth Historic Dockyard also includes a dockyard apprentice museum housed in boathouse number 7 and an action stations museum housed in boathouse number 6.

Action Stations allows you to investigate the modern Navy. The museum allows you to see what the modern Navy is up to around the world before watching a 24 minute

action packed movie. The movie depicts HMS Monarch combating gold bullion pirates in the South Seas. After watching the movie you get to see if you have got what it takes to join the Navy by using simulations.

Moving to the upper level of the museum you get to explore the weapons used by the Navy and to experience refuelling a ship via a bridge simulator. There is a full-scale replica of a cockpit of a Merlin helicopter to be experienced before experiencing the Royal Marines and Operations Room. Last of all is a simulator where you can join a Royal Marines Raider Boat and be a part of the raid.

The dockyard also features a dockyard apprentice museum, which allows you to experience being a dockyard apprentice. The dockyard apprentice museum allows you to discover the skills and crafts used to build the dreadnought battleship. The Dockyard Apprentice display is located within boathouse number 7.

You have now reached the end of this audio guide. Thank you for listening and while you are in Portsmouth's Historic Dockyard why not take a few minutes to explore its attractions further.

For other audio walks of Portsmouth or for more information about Portsmouth please go to www.portsmouth-guide.co.uk when you return home.