

Portsmouth Society News

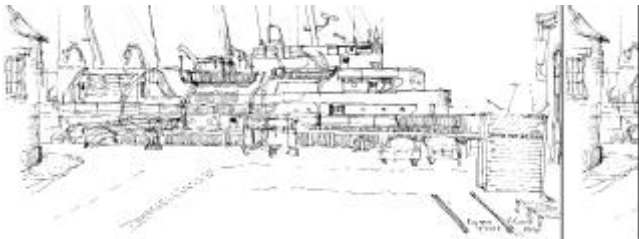
The newsletter of the Portsmouth Society - January 1998

CAPE TOWN LESSONS FOR GUNWHARF

Cape Town and Portsmouth have many historic links, not the least of which is the Royal Navy, a regular visitor to Cape Town, one of the British Empire's most important staging posts in the trade with the Far East. It even has a dry dock built by Admiralty engineers for HMS Warrior. For many years, like Gunwharf, the historic Victoria and Alfred basins were closed off to the public. Development there started in 1991 and is still ongoing. Gunwharf is due to start imminently. Portsmouth is busy trying to build a new future for itself, based on naval heritage. But there are even more direct links between the two cities.

The Lordland element of Berkeley Lordland who are developing Gunwharf are the retail management specialists at the Victoria and Alfred. The V and A itself has been employed to give second opinions to Berkeley's proposals. All of these people are regular visitors to Gunwharf and Portsmouth. They know about it and they have views about it. BBC South's reporter Freddie Rostand has been to Cape Town to meet them, to discover what lessons there are for Portsmouth from the V and A - a waterfront development on an historic site, much like Gunwharf. How have they managed to resolve the issue of keeping in touch with their heritage whilst developing a profitable future? What sort of new buildings should be built?

Continued on page 2



La Frégate, St Helier - an exciting landmark building on Jersey's seafront. What will we get in the way of buildings along the Millenium Promenade? See "When the Boat Comes In".

Southern Eye

The BBC Southern Eye programme, probably to be broadcast at 7.30 pm on Thursday 5 February, compares Lordlands' Victoria and Alfred Waterfront development in Cape Town with the proposed Lordlands' and Berkeley Homes development Gunwharf Quays.

Freddie Rostand of BBC TV South went to Cape Town before Christmas to look for lessons and parallels for Gunwharf.

In this issue: Gunwharf, New secondary School, Towards 2000, Cycle Routes...

Cape Town Lessons for Gunwharf... (continued from page 1)

What old ones should be preserved? How important is the history of the site and how much should it be interpreted within the development?

And what about the living heritage? In Cape Town the water traffic plays a vital role in the success of the waterfront, the old penny ferry and so forth. There are now 13 different types of waterbuses and ferries, from traditional rowing boats to a coal-fired tug, a steam launch and luxury catamarans. People do need diversity: some like to feel the salt spray on their faces, some want cover and a bar downstairs. In Cape Town there is a fishing fleet and a fish processing factory occupying the site left derelict after the demise of the Union Castle liners.

Freddie Rostand also examined just what are the benefits for the local community. Is it just low skill leisure jobs for local people, and temporary construction work? He will be reporting on the way the V and A have taken a radical approach to this issue. There are parallels with Southsea's relationship to Gunwharf. He went to an area called Seapoint, "a Bohemian quarter, which has a big esplanade, boats, guest houses and specialist shops. He looked at the effect on this area of the V and A.

In the programme he also looks at the traffic implications for Portsmouth following the Cape Town model - 20 million visits this year. Those cars have to park somewhere. What does that mean for Portsmouth?

"The most interesting element really from my point of view" says Freddie Rostand "is that we have been to the other side of the world to what claims to be a successful waterfront development and have heard their views of Gunwharf and what it is that makes for a successful waterfront development. Do they think the developers have got it right?."

"Here are two cities at opposite ends of the globe reinventing themselves for the new Millennium. Cape Town is further down the road but is closely involved in the Portsmouth scheme. What can we foresee for the Portsmouth of the future from the Cape Town of today?"

When the Boat Comes In

Paul Spooner, Head of Marketing for the City Council, responsible for the Millennium tower and promenade, recently expressed to us his keenness for excellence in design of public buildings. In the summer he was enthralled by the superb quality of Foster's Carré d'Art, museum of contemporary art and public library, facing the ancient Roman Maison Carré across the central square at Nîmes in southern France.

Jersey's seafront has recently been startled by an extraordinary café, La Frégate, a landmark building, "like a tubby fish mutating into an upturned boat", designed by Will Alsop and local architect Derek Mason. After some persuading it was endorsed by the local enterprise board. It has put Jersey on the international design map for the first time; it already has its own souvenir shop!

What will we get in the way of buildings along the Millennium Promenade? We hope it will not be safe Edwardian repro lamps, but something modern, exciting and talked about - like La Frégate.



Above: Foster's Carré d'Art in Nîmes

Design of Portsmouth's new Secondary School

As its prime objective, the Portsmouth Society has the achievement of "the highest standards of architecture and planning", shared by our parent body the Civic Trust. To this end we have for the last fifteen years given annual design awards for the Best New Building our plaques being unveiled by the Lord Mayor each year.

This year's winner was the University's Portland Building, which houses the schools of architecture and land management, designed by Sir Colin Stansfield Smith, former county architect, whose team won an RIBA Gold medal particularly for their school designs. Until a new agency agreement, Portsmouth also used to design excellent new schools, such as Stamshaw Infants School, one of four schools to which we have given design awards. We look forward to judging Admiral Lord Nelson School next autumn. Our criteria place strong emphasis on feedback from the users, as well as aesthetics and the building's contribution to its context

We are therefore very interested to hear more about the commissioning processes for the new secondary school required in southern Portsmouth. Is it to be a community school? Our understanding of recent policy guidance by the Department for Education and Employment is that well designed and maintained schools have a very positive effect on the quality of education. We were concerned to read the recent report to the Education Committee, quoting undated advice - from the 1970s? - that the physical environment of a school is a relatively low priority. The government including Ministers such as Chris Smith MP and Mark Fisher MP has said a great deal about improving the quality of public buildings, and it is ours and other people's experience - exemplified in the Portland Building - that excellence in the design of education buildings need cost no more than mediocre ones.

If the City Council intend to go for a Private Finance Initiative for the new school, how will they ensure that a quality statement is delivered? We know that the City Council has the specialist capacity to design the school in house. If it were, it might then be possible to involve future staff and governors - and perhaps pupils - in the commissioning and design process - as happened at Solent Infants School, to which we also gave an award in 1996, because this process was so successful in achieving excellence in design.

The text of this article was taken from a letter sent by the Portsmouth Society to Ms Anna Lawson, Portsmouth City Council's Chief Education Officer.

Design Awards Ceremony



The Lord Mayor unveiled plaques in November for the winning entries in the 1997 Portsmouth Society Design Awards. Pictured at HMS Nelson, winner of the Best Restoration, are (from left to right) Kate Mackintosh architect, Celia Clark (both judges), Cdr Iain Shepherd, Commander HMS Nelson, Cllr Tony Golds, Lord Mayor of Portsmouth and John Holland (judge). Robin Partington (judge) was unable to attend.

PAY HERE! PAY HERE! PAY HERE!

An ugly rash of yellow signs scream for the motorists' money at the western end of Southsea Common - no fewer than fifteen of them between the Queen's Hotel and Clarence Pier. Guildhall Square and Guildhall Walk are similarly disfigured and around the corner there are four in the short length of Exchange Road.

Nobody but the Engineering Service would be allowed - or would want - to clutter the landscape in this outrageous way. And don't these machines cost money? Or have they bought a job lot that they have to fit somewhere? Surely there's a less unsightly way to charge for parking.

Gunwharf and the Tower

In the middle of December I had an appointment at my request with two of the directors of Berkeley Homes, the appointed developers of the Gunwharf site and the firm charged with the design, building and operation of the millennium tower. I had a very friendly reception.

I was shown, on condition that I kept the information to myself, two of the three designs for the tower which the public will be invited to choose from in the New Year. I was agreeably surprised. I was expecting something rather old fashioned as illustrated in the millennium publicity we have all seen. These were modern designs, unlike any tower in existence that I know of, and more impressive than the tower which I saw in September being built on the Expo 98 site in Lisbon. If we have to have a tower I would be happy with either of these two.

I asked them a number of questions about the development of the Gunwharf site itself and these were their answers.

Car Parking for Residents

At one of the focus group meetings organised by the City Planning Officer in February 1997 a reference was made to a residential scheme for Edinburgh which would have no provision for cars. I showed them the plan for this and a similar scheme proposed for a London suburb. Berkeleys will not consider this. They don't think they could sell it. Central London or central Edinburgh are one thing, they thought - people who could afford cars already do live there

without them - edge of Portsmouth is another.

'Modern Design'

They don't want 'modern' design for their housing. They rightly guessed that it is what I would like to see. People don't want it, they think, and they pointed to the success of the 'Georgian' King James Gate in Old Portsmouth.

Water Frontage

Countering the criticism that not enough of the water frontage was being used for places where people could sit and eat, admire the view and watch the activities of the harbour, they say the whole of the northern, non-residential sector will in the revised design have pubs, cafés etc. on the waterfront. The shops will be behind. Asked about the effect of the factory shopping application for Whiteley, they replied that obviously they would have preferred it not to happen; but they think Gunwharf will be much more of an attraction because it will be not just a shopping trip but will offer cinema, other entertainments and the harbour-side location.

Less Shopping?

I put it to them that they would not lose money - might even make more - by having more housing and less shopping. They did not think so.

Roger James

Controversy

In this issue we are going rather outside our usual reporting course and being more 'pro-active' in advocating a number of policies and schemes which are obviously controversial. If we do not get adverse feedback from members about this and the items below, we shall press them in whatever ways seem appropriate during the year ahead. Will members therefore phone in and leave a message on my ansafone on 734555 on Sunday 18th or 25th January if they wish to object to, support or just comment on any of these matters in this issue of the newsletter, leaving their name and telephone number for response? Among these matters is our attitude to Light Rail Transport, LRT. We have decided to press for the proposal made by Charles Burns in the last newsletter.

In essence it recognises that the difficulty in funding the £40m cost of the tunnel under the harbour is likely to jeopardise the whole scheme. We suggest that as a start the LRT runs from Fareham station to Gosport ferry terminal only, the trams continuing along the existing railway line to Southampton with additional stops that can be arranged cheaply where they would cost £100,000 at least for a railway station. The existing 'heavy' trains would either share the existing track with the LRT (as done successfully at Karlsruhe in Germany) or be routed via Eastleigh with a short new interconnection at Eastleigh (already planned), giving the advantage of direct communication between Portsmouth and Southampton Airport. Once the Southampton-Gosport route is established as a success it is likely to generate the enthusiasm and the resources to build the tunnel and then, what seems to us the most important part, phase 2: Portsmouth-Waterlooville.

Roger James, Secretary

Continental Ferry Port Motorway Exit

On 6 May 1997 Charles Burns and Roger James appeared on behalf of the Society at a public inquiry investigating a £600,000 scheme to provide a new route for the exit of traffic from the Continental Ferry Port in order to prevent traffic congestion in the region of the termination of the M275 motorway at the Rudmore roundabout.

The inquiry was being held because of objections to the scheme by some local residents on the grounds that it would cause them nuisance of various kinds. We joined in very late because we heard about the scheme only a week or two before the inquiry and the substance of our objection was very different. It was to the enormous cost of a scheme which we thought would not solve any real problem and certainly not the problem which was apparent when the inspector did his site visit. There was then at 4 o'clock on a weekday afternoon, a complete deadlock of traffic which was clearly due to the large number of heavy lorries arriving via the M275 and which were being admitted one by one to the Ferry Port. This column of lorries blocked the Rudmore roundabout and prevented the peak hour northbound traffic from the city centre from getting to either Kingston Crescent or Stamshaw. It was only too obvious that the scheme which we had been looking at for a new way out from the Ferryport would have done nothing at all to alleviate this impasse. For the scheme proposed a new road leading directly from the Ferry Port to the access road leading from the roundabout to the M275 through a traffic light-controlled junction.

In the course of the site visit it did transpire that

much could be done by internal rearrangement within the Ferry Port to resolve the problem - by allowing the lorries on to the site before they are checked and processed, or by traffic lights allowing lorries to emerge from the southbound slip-road on to the roundabout only when the way off the roundabout is clear. We have urged the City Engineer to carry out one of these suggestions before he implements the scheme which will take a lot of the money that could be put to better uses in the city. We are often being told that there is no money to carry out all sorts of desired schemes, from park-and-ride to traffic calming.

We have written to the City Engineer saying:

"Can we please have spelt out what the problem is we are trying to solve? Is it congestion caused by traffic going into the Ferry Port or traffic going out, or both? Your scheme will do absolutely nothing for traffic going in and yet that was clearly the cause of the gridlock on the roundabout at the time the inspector made his site visit".

The inspector rejected our objection saying, in his report, that cost was not part of his remit and our allegation that "the wrong problem was being addressed", as he put it, also lay outside his competence. We complained to the Department of Transport that his report did not cover adequately the two main points of our objection, only to be told that our only redress now lay through the High Court. We tried the District Auditor on the grounds that this was a misuse of public funds, also to no avail.

Roger James

The Sewage Scheme

Although it is by no means ideal, the proposed scheme for sewage disposal is a triumph for Malcolm Hill of ERASE (Eastney Residents Against Sewage Extension) whose persistence has finally persuaded Southern Water to adopt his idea which is to treat all the sewage of Portsmouth and Havant at a new enlarged and improved plant at Budds Farm where it will undergo primary treatment (sedimentation and screening to remove solids) and secondary (bacterial oxidation to purify the liquid). Portsmouth's sewage, which will still collect at the Eastney pumping station, will be pumped from there to Budds Farm through a pumping main which will be inside a 2-meter diameter tunnel through which the treated effluent from Budds Farm will flow by gravity down to Eastney. From there it will be pumped out to sea via the existing long sea outfall.

However the scheme is still not good enough. Nearly all the nuisance before and since the long sea outfall was made has been due to discharge of untreated sewage into Langstone Channel and Langstone Harbour in storm conditions. Under the new scheme it is said to be likely that there would be up to three discharges per bathing season and even this would be of screened sewage. However when heavy rain comes suddenly after a period of drought, large amounts of greasy solids are flushed out of the sewers and tend to block the screens which then overflow, resulting in the same thing - the discharge of particularly offensive untreated sewage.

We have objected to the scheme, claiming it to be inadequate. We say that they should be required to aim at storm overflow only in exceptional circumstances. What is proposed is that storage shall

The Sewage Scheme (continued)

be substantially increased but not enough.

The Environment Agency (a new body resulting from the amalgamation of the National Rivers Authority and HM Inspectorate of Pollution, with local headquarters at Winchester) have the power to approve or reject the sewage scheme. Mr John Adams, the Regional Water Quality Control Officer of the EA, told the Portsmouth Environment Forum that rejection could be only on the grounds that the proposals do not meet existing regulations and guidelines, not that they fail to anticipate future tightening. Ultraviolet (tertiary) treatment of the effluent, which ERASE and the City Council are demanding, is not yet an official requirement.

If the contamination of the Southsea bathing water comes, as we suspect, from the long sea outfall, the new scheme is likely to cure it. Although the sewage will still be discharged from the same point, the effluent will now be liquid and subject to an enormous dilution factor. At present it contains solid particles which can coalesce, drift to South Parade Pier, be broken up against the iron piers and release their bacteria into the water.

The three authorities concerned: Southern Water, the Environment Agency and the City Council all still maintain that the contaminating source is a leaking sewer on the shore, which they have still to locate after spending hundreds of thousands of pounds in the search. R.J.

Towards 2000 and Beyond

The planning department have published a document with this title about improving the city centre. It is not a detailed plan but an outline of their suggestions for what needs to be done. They asked us to respond by the middle of December. The executive committee of the Society did so with detailed suggestions amplifying the outline of the document. While applauding the outline, we disagreed on two points:

1. We think banks and building societies actively detract from the qualities of 'vibrancy and attractiveness' of a shopping area which is the aim. We therefore do not agree with the suggestion that the conversion of shops to banks and building societies should be allowed.

2. We do not agree with Park & Ride based on the Rudmore/Ferry Port area. While very much in favour of park & ride from the mainland, we are opposed to starting it from the Rudmore/Ferry Port area. We think this is much too near the centre. On their way there motorists will be liable to encounter the very congestion that P&R is designed to help them to avoid. At various times there is gridlock on the Rudmore roundabout caused by streams of heavy lorries trying to get into the Ferry Port. We think North Harbour is the ideal location for P&R, although we support the Council in opposing the Leisure Centre there.

To enhance the attraction of the city centre

1. We want to resurrect a suggestion made some years ago by the former City Architect, Ken Norrish, namely to cover in the precinct part of Commercial Road, either totally with a glazed canopy at roof level or partially with glazed canopies cantilevered out at first floor

level, so that you can walk past the shops under cover.

2. So far as is possible convert the ground floor front of the Civic Offices to shops or cafés as in the original Esher plan for the Square. Certainly the Mountbatten Gallery, which is something of a white elephant, would make a very nice restaurant. Whatever it is used for it needs a more welcoming and easily found entrance, straight off the Square.

3. We would like to narrow the eastern end of Station Street with an additional building at the southern end of Commercial Road - perhaps absorbing the Tourist Information greenhouse into its ground floor - with the object of reducing the visual gap between the civic centre and the commercial centre.

4. The staircases down from the Norrish library need urgent improvement. The one down to Alec Rose Lane is much too narrow. There is great congestion there when there is a concert on in the Guildhall. The one straight down towards Guildhall Walk is also narrow, rather dangerous and badly lighted. Also the alleyway at the side of the library leading to the car park at the rear needs to be made more welcoming and better lighted.

To provide ease of access from the rest of the city

This is very necessary. The southern part of the city suffers from having two east-west barriers across it, very close together: the railway and Winston Churchill Avenue. We suggest making the second, Winston Churchill Avenue, much less obstructive by

1. reducing it to a single carriageway throughout

Towards 2000 and Beyond (continued)

its length (the amount of traffic does not justify its size), reducing the speed limit to 30 mph, removing the intimidating central brick 'man trap' barrier from the western end of the road and making a new pedestrian-friendly one (like the central reservation in the sunken part of the road) a yard or two further south, and using what was the westbound carriageway as a more direct cycle route.

2. Pelican or zebra crossings at the points where pedestrians want to cross: across the police station roundabout, opposite the Eldon Building, connecting the Queen's Mile to St. James's Road, and opposite Middle Street.

3. The traffic lights at the Town Station cause exasperation to motorists and pedestrians alike and result in queues of buses trying to emerge from Commercial Road filling the precinct with smoke and fumes. We propose replacing the lights with a mini-roundabout with pedestrian refuges in the middle of each of the approach roads, as we have now at the Kings Road/Terraces junction. Or has anybody a better solution?

4. Urgently needed is ground level pedestrian access from Guildhall Square to the station.

5. Paradise Street needs to revert to two-way at least at its northern end to allow access to the Tesco car park from the north.

6. A pedestrian crossing over the western end of King Richard I Street, where there are signs saying Cross Here; but nobody in their senses dares to do so because there is fast traffic from two directions.

7. Provide a footpath on the western side of Anglesea Road along the United Services ground.

8. Remove the provocative iron railing central barrier along Anglesea Road near the railway bridge, which people vault over at great danger to themselves.

"Promote ...space above commercial properties for residential purposes".

We agree strongly with this and suggest that it be made a condition for granting planning permission for new buildings or conversions of old ones of more than three storeys that the upper floors must be residential. Wetherspoons pub at the corner of Guildhall Square is a particular example where the upper floors are almost entirely unused. This is all part of bringing life into what is a dead area after the shops shut for the night.

Partial redevelopment

In redeveloping the Tricorn a way needs to be found of integrating St. Agatha's into the centre. Cascades Approach isolates it and renders the associated landscaped gardens almost unused.

Northern end of the precinct

The gun at the northern end of the precinct, illustrated in the planning document, has an unfortunate symbolism. It seems to be repelling all comers. This end of the precinct certainly needs careful and artistic refurbishment. If the style of the ABC roundabout - 'naff' in our view - is to be retained then the gravel needs to be frequently raked.

The Traders' proposal

The committee agreed to the above written before we knew of the Commercial Road Traders' scheme for pedestrianising down to the southern end of Guildhall Walk. We like this idea which would of course render some of our ideas unnecessary.

A dead hand?

The City Planning Officer has said that our suggestions for traffic and roads will have to be referred to the City Engineer. Experience has led us to expect this will result in a dead end or in arbitrary unheralded action, e.g. Albert Road traffic lights. We urge councillors to ensure that these undoubted problems are imaginatively addressed. RJ

Cycle Routes in Southsea

Some committee members who live in Southsea complain of the lack of cycle routes in the southern part of the city. There is no cycle route of any sort south of Elm Grove.

We recognise the fierce difference of opinion that there is about permitting cycling on the Promenade and the possibility of marking off a strip of it in its wider parts for cycling. Cycling along the Parades and the Esplanades is very unpleasant if not dangerous, largely because of the parked cars, especially those parked in

echelon. However, there are two parallel smooth asphalted paths a hundred yards apart, collectively known as the Ladies' Mile, stretching from the eastern end of Common, near the skate board park, to near the Queens Hotel. Both are labelled No Cycling. We have suggested to the City Engineer that one at least of these should be signed as a cycle route as a start to an east-west route right across the southern part of the city. What do members think?

Roger James

Millennium - or is it?

Jeffrey Steele has sent us this from a lecture by Stephen Bann, a professor at Canterbury:

In roughly the year 500 there was a monk called Dionysus Exiguus (a slightly ridiculous name even at the time) who invented the Christian era. He was of Scythian birth residing in Italy. There was a dispute at this particular period, as indeed there was throughout the Middle Ages, about the correct method of calculating Easter. Dionysus Exiguus prepared the Anno Domini system of dating to replace the only other sequential system of dating in the West, which was dating from the foundation of Rome 'ab urbe condita'. The curious thing about it all is that Dionysus invented the AD system of dating but he didn't actually use it! He continued to date his letters by a fifteen year cycle, deriving from the tax collecting habits of the Roman emperors, reapplied after Constantine refounded the empire.

From the sixth century onwards everyone tended to date according to this cyclical pattern, returning to the same point after a particular time. Only a long time after Dionysus - by about the eleventh century - was the Anno Domini system of dating established in most of Europe. Once it became widespread, the AD system became almost irreversible. It is now a substantial part of the psychological set of all those familiar with all forms of written or spoken culture throughout the world, *integrally related to the current date. On another level it is a totally arbitrary way of signifying our position in time.
(* A bit monocultural! CC)

Future Programme

Meetings are held at the Norrish Central Library (Room F, 3rd Floor), Guildhall Square, Portsmouth unless otherwise stated. There is no admission charge and the meetings are open to the public.

Wednesday 4th February at 7.30 pm

Review of the Society's 1997 Design Awards
presented by the competition's judges.

Wednesday 4th March at 7.30 pm

Waterfront and Dockyard Renewals

Speaker: Celia Clark

Wednesday 1st April at 7.30 pm

AGM and Member's talk-back

Your views, opinions and in particular, how do we renew the society?

Sunday 5th April at 9.00am

Day Trip to Fort Nothe, Weymouth.

Joint excursion with Gosport Society. Depart Ferry Gardens, Gosport at 9:20 (take 9:07 ferry from Portsmouth Harbour). Adults £10 includes entry to fort. Lunch (optional) £5. Children 1/2 price. See booking form for details

Wednesday 7th May at 7.30 pm

Gosport's Historic Buildings

Speaker: Lesley Burton, Chairman of The Gosport Society.

Saturday 16th May at 2.00pm

"Plaque and Plague"

Open top bus tour of Portsmouth (departing from Guildhall Square) viewing buildings we have given awards to and those we have not! The City Planning Officer will accompany us. Please book your places by phoning Roger James on 734555. There will be a small charge to cover costs.

Wednesday 3rd June at 7.30 pm

City Farms

Speakers to include Eddie Salt of the Portsmouth City Farm project.

Wednesday 1st July at 7.00 pm

Summer Walkabout, details in next newsletter.

Wednesday 7th October at 7.30pm

Impressions of Poland

Speaker: Professor Ray Riley, former lecturer in Geography at the Polytechnic (as it was then), author of four Portsmouth Papers and several books, recently living and working in Poland.

Saturday 10th October

Autumn Party, details in next newsletter

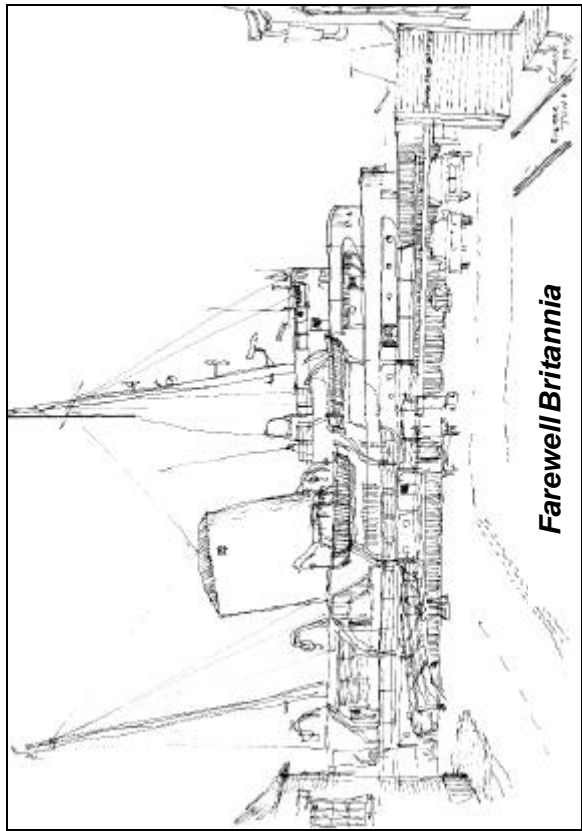
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We welcome new members. Please come to any of our meetings or contact Jean Thompson for more details.



Farewell Britannia