

Portsmouth Society News

The Newsletter of The Portsmouth Society - Winter 2006

'Maritime City - Portsmouth 1945 - 2005'

Edited by Ray Riley for the Portsmouth Society

To celebrate the new millennium, the Portsmouth Society mounted an exhibition of photographs and accompanying text featuring Portsmouth in the period 1945 to 2000. The exhibition was held in St Agatha's Church in the summer of 2000 and generated much interest. It has long been our desire to publish much of the content in a book and we are delighted to announce that **'Maritime City - Portsmouth 1945 - 2005'**, edited by Ray Riley for the Portsmouth Society, has now been published.

Like so many towns and cities, Portsmouth has undergone numerous changes since the Second World War, having to accommodate the car, replacing many old and outworn houses, accept the demise of old established industries, and come to terms with dramatic change in retailing, which has seen the demise of many small food shops and general stores and the rise of the supermarket and superstore.

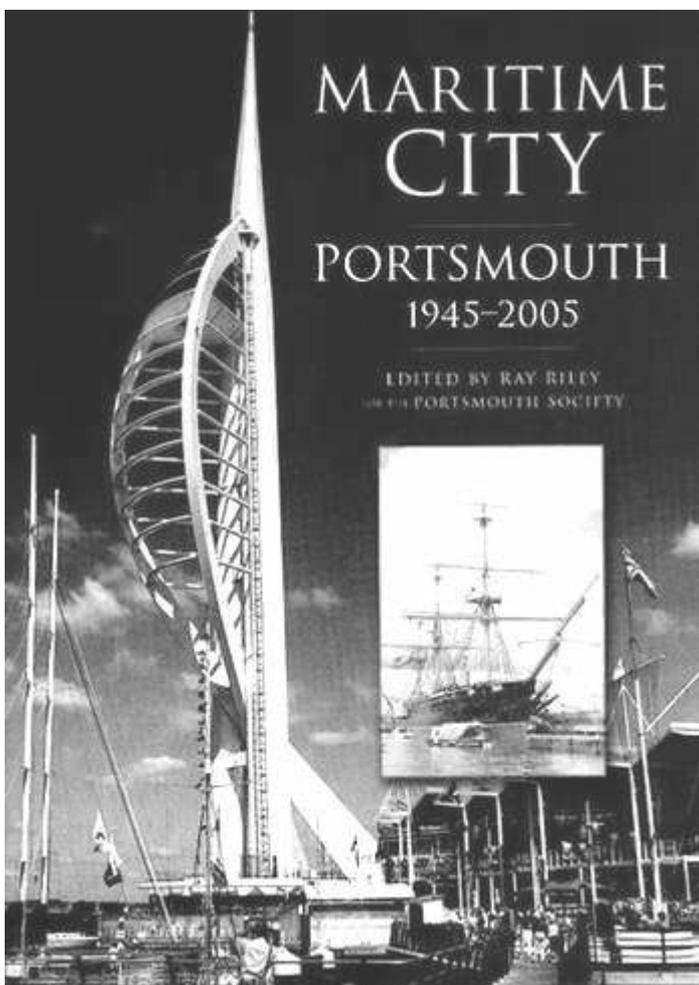
But Portsmouth is essentially a maritime city, a very special one at that, for at its centre - indeed the reason for its existence - is the naval dockyard. For centuries the town flourished in times of war, but the introduction of missiles and nuclear submarines in place of many conventional craft caused employment to fall from 25,000 in the 1950s to 2,000 at the end of the twentieth century. Yet against all expectation this contraction has been absorbed without undue difficulty.

The book provides a fascinating record of the buildings and streets that have been lost forever by insensitive redevelopment but also looks at what is positive about the city today. There is now a major continental ferry port and the Gun Wharf ammunition depot has been transformed into one of the largest retail, leisure and residential complexes in the country.

Many other changes have taken place elsewhere in the city: in housing, public buildings, transport systems, shops, factories and offices. Members of the Portsmouth Society have each covered a key area and have used a careful selection of old and new photographs, maps and plans to illustrate the key changes to the built environment of one of Britain's fastest-changing cities.

Contributors include: Ray Riley, Celia Clark, John Pike, Deane Clark, Roger James, Bruce Oliver, John Offord and Jane Smith. The book will appeal to all those who are interested in architecture and town planning and will also be a fascinating read for residents of the city and all those who know Portsmouth. It is available at local retailers including WH Smith and Ottakers.

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In this edition .. What's On? Southern Comfort, Architecture Week 2006, Brunel Bicentennial Celebrations, Nuclear or Not?, St George's Road Pelican crossing, Nothing to Report, Peter Cobb, Decaying Public Heritage, Northern Quarter - outline permission granted

Meetings and Events

Meetings are on the first Wednesday of each month (not Jan/Jul./Aug/Sep) in Central Portsmouth. No admission charge - all are welcome. For latest programme see www.portsmouthsociety.org.uk .	
Saturday 18th Feb <i>10am - 3pm</i>	Open Day at Wymering Manor An opportunity to view the oldest house in Portsmouth and soon to be closed Youth Hostel. See the article on page 4.
11 February to 5 March	Place of Worship An exhibition of photographs by Garrick Palmer. <u>Venue:</u> Anglican Cathedral, High Street, Old Portsmouth
Wednesday 1st March <i>7.30pm</i>	Portsmouth's Water Supply Speaker : Andy Neve, Portsmouth Water Company. <u>Venue:</u> Cathedral Discovery Centre, Edinburgh Rd.
Wednesday 5th April <i>7.30pm</i>	Annual General Meeting and open forum. <u>Venue:</u> John Pounds Centre, Queen Street
Wednesday 3rd May <i>7.30pm</i>	Walled Cities get together Dr Celia Clark, Chair of the Portsmouth Society, reports on her recent visit to China. <u>Venue:</u> John Pounds Centre, Queen Street
Wednesday 7th June <i>7.30pm</i> www.princes-foundation.org	The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment Speaker : James Hulme, Acting Director of Education will speak about the Foundation, which exists to improve the quality of people's lives by teaching and practising timeless ways of building. <u>Venue:</u> John Pounds Centre, Queen Street
Saturday 17th June <i>9:30am to 1.00pm</i> see www.architectureweek.org.uk	Architecture Week Bus Tour A repeat of 2005's successful event visiting fine buildings in Portsmouth, including the winners in the 2005 Design Awards. Booking form in next newsletter.
7th - 10th September www.heritageopendays.org.uk	Heritage Open Days - Celebrate England's architecture and culture with free access to properties that are usually closed to the public or normally charge for admission. More details nearer the time.
Weds 4th Oct <i>7.30pm</i>	Monthly meeting - speaker to be confirmed.
Weds 1st Nov <i>7.30pm</i>	Monthly meeting - speaker to be confirmed.
Weds 6th Dec <i>7.30pm</i>	Christmas meeting - speaker to be confirmed.

Monthly Meetings - New venue from April

Starting with the AGM in April, we will be holding our monthly meetings at the brand new John Pounds Centre off Queen Street (entrance off Aylward Street). The centre, run by the John Pounds Trust, brings a host of community facilities under one roof. We will be using a meeting room on the first floor which has the latest fixtures and fittings complete with modern audio-visual facilities.

Arriving by train or ferry: The nearest railway station is Portsmouth Harbour and you can walk to the centre in 5-10 minutes. From The Hard, walk up Queen Street and take the 6th street on the right, Aylward Street.

Arriving by bus: All buses approaching The Hard Interchange from the City Centre via Queen Street pass within yards of the centre. Alight at the bus stop opposite the 1960's shops and post office opposite Bishop Street. Walk east and turn right at Aylward Street.

Arriving by car: Queen Street is the principal route to The Hard There are disabled parking bays at the centre plus 8 or so other spaces - access to all these spaces is from Aylward Street. The University's Portland Building car park on St James Street may also be used (evenings and weekends only). When you leave the Portland Building car park, you will see the back of the John Pounds Centre. Walk back to Queen Street, head west towards The Hard, and take the 1st left onto Aylward Street. There is parking also on Kent St.

Lost? Phone the centre at 23 Queen Street, Portsmouth PO1 3HN on 023 9289 2010. Developments continue in and around the site and, eventually, there will be a pedestrian entrance from Queen Street. The John Pounds Web site is www.johnpoundscentre.co.uk .

Northern Quarter - Outline Permission Granted

At a special meeting of the Portsmouth City Council's Development Control Committee 10th November, outline permission was granted for the Northern Quarter retail redevelopment. In addition, detailed planning permission was given to the badly designed traffic scheme. As we have reported before, there will be 4 extra sets of traffic lights for vehicles entering and leaving the city, a vast area will be given over to tarmac, and there will be no direct access for vehicles approaching from Southsea, Gunwharf and Portsea,



Despite the councillors expressing concern about the traffic scheme, the immense loss of green landscape and the arguments over the setting of St. Agatha's, they unanimously granted permission. The chair, Councillor Scott, said she wanted to see use of local materials, car sharing, replacement of the green landscaping and micro generation - but, unfortunately, no stipulation was made that these MUST be in the next phase.

Centros Miller's scheme for Northern Quarter by architects Chapman Taylor

Several councillors insisted that the new buildings' designs must be of excellent quality. Councillor Hugh Mason said that he wanted assurances that this scheme would have some interesting townscapes (the proposed streets are dull). Chief Planning Officer, John Slater, said that these would result from the Urban Design Principles....

The Portsmouth Society deputation pointed-out that there was no need to destroy Merrick Denton Thompson's mature green wedge in the middle of Mile End Road nor the beautiful green buffer to the Buckland wall - which includes several unusual trees - if they did not put a right turn into Flathouse Road (a feature which the MOD did not support).

We expressed grave concern at the loss of Pitt Street Baths (used by many groups, including the University Athletics Club), about loss of the oval green park created by Hazel Hine as a setting for St. Agathas and the two new buildings hemming in St. Agatha's Church. The developers made great play that they had been to Europe to see how they do pedestrian streets.

The next stage is for detailed plans to be submitted. We will scrutinise them carefully, and we urge you to do likewise. The Portsmouth Society is NOT opposed to development on the Tricorn site, but we have grave concerns about Centros Miller's submissions.

Brunel Bicentennial Celebrations

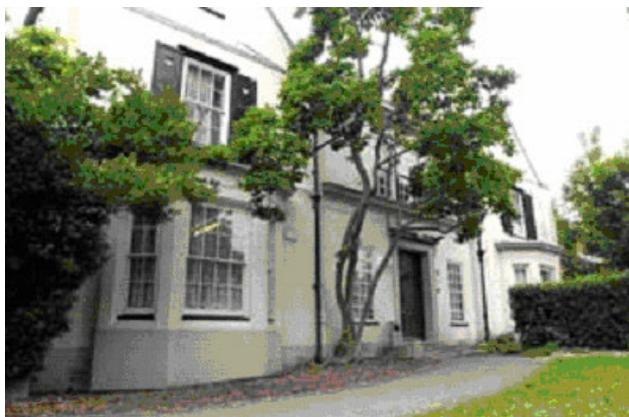
To celebrate the 200th anniversary of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's birth, Professor Angus Buchanan will be giving a lecture on this famous son of Portsmouth on Friday 7 April 2006 at 2.00pm in the Portland Building, Portland Street. Professor Buchanan is regarded as one of the foremost speakers on the subject of Brunel and his work. This lecture is organised by the University of Portsmouth in association with the Institutions of Civil and Mechanical Engineering and the Royal Institute of Naval Architecture.

All are also welcome to the unveiling of a monument to Brunel in St George's Square, Portsea in the morning at 11.30am.

On 8th and 9th April, celebrations will continue in the Portsmouth Historic Dockyard with a "Celebration of Steam". The dockyard is home to HMS Warrior 1860, the ship that Brunel's technology influenced and The Block Mills, the world's first complete steam powered factory with blockmaking machinery invented by Brunel's father, Marc Brunel. The weekend will feature Talks and tours to The Block Mills, displays of Traction Engines, Road Locomotives, Miniatures, Steam Boats, Steam fairground attractions and Model Railways. Web references : www.port.ac.uk/newsandevents/events, www.historicdockyard.co.uk/events

Wymering Manor - the oldest house in Portsmouth

Wymering Manor and the church of St. Peter and St. Paul are the oldest house and the oldest church (with St. Thomas's Cathedral) in Portsmouth. There is record of a Saxon building on the site of the manor in 1047, perhaps where there had once been a Roman villa. The Wymering Manor Estate, one of the oldest manors in Hampshire through which the main south coast road ran, stretched across to Cosham and onto Portsea Island and encompassed much of what today is Hilsea. At the time of the Domesday survey, Wymering Manor, with lands in Cosham and Portchester, belonged to the Crown. By 1167 the King had granted the Manor to the Albermarle Family. The earl lived here, and on his death the manor reverted to the crown. Edward I gave it to his mother Eleanor, who in 1260 exchanged it for lands at Ringwood. In 1595 Wymering Manor became the property of the Wayte family; whose name was given to a street in the nearby village of Cosham.



The present Manor and the Vicarage date from the seventeenth century. Richard Norton, Cromwell's 'Mad Dick' who signed King Charles 1's death warrant lived here then. The Manor belonged to the Bruning family who were Roman Catholics. Curious features of the house are the two 'priest-holes' or hiding places and a small square window which looked along the coast road to the west. Dr. William Smith, physician to the Portsmouth Garrison and founder of Portsmouth Grammar School lived in the house in 1732. In 1821 Thomas Gosling sold the house to Thomas Thistlethwayte of Southwick, still an estate village north of Portsdown Hill. In 1860 a Catholic religious order, the Brotherhood of St. Augustine and the Sisterhood of St. Mary, founded in London, occupied the manor and vicarage. They departed in 1872. In 1899 the family of Thomas Knowsley Parr, a descendent of Catherine Parr, the sixth wife of King Henry VIII moved to Wymering Manor from Bold Hall, Lancashire, which had been demolished for a coal mine. Many fine architectural features such as the sweeping double staircase with its barley-sugar twist balusters and gallery were rescued and installed in Wymering Manor. The Manor's half-H plan was filled in the nineteenth or twentieth century. In the 1930s Mr. Metcalfe, the last private owner, who was a designer for Airspeed, set up lathes in what had been the magnificent early nineteenth century drawing room. Neville Shute the novelist, who celebrated his work for Airspeed on Portsmouth airport in his novel Slide Rule, and the famous solo pilot Amy Johnson both came here at that time.



The drawing room

It was at the instigation of Cllr. Mrs. Mack back in 1960 that the Manor House was purchased by the City Council to save it from demolition. Much of the garden was sold off, and the site is now hemmed in by houses. Forty years of use as a Youth Hostel has provided as many as three thousand young people a year the opportunity to stay in an old house and savour its atmosphere (ghosts and all). In acquiring such a rare gem of an architecturally historic building the Council was taking on a big responsibility. But neither the City Council as freeholders nor the YHA as Tenant are now prepared to undertake the structural repairs, costed four years ago at £150,000, which led to closure of most of the north wing. The YHA are looking for a site more central to the city and its transport links.

Naturally, those of us who love the history of our City are both horrified and saddened to think that this wonderful building which had its origins before the Domesday Book was written, may be sold to a private owner and lost to the City for ever. A private buyer has made an offer for the manor, and plans have been drawn up by Parnells in Havant for conversion of the main house into two, with two more houses in the grounds, a proposal which would we hope be unacceptable to English Heritage for a Grade II* house. The Portsmouth Society, Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust, Portsmouth Heritage Watch, people who love

the building or used to work there have joined forces with local residents to try to find a viable and appropriate use for the building, with a feasibility study grant from the Architectural Heritage Fund. Ghost busters, or parapsychological research and vampire weekends are already popular at the manor. Families on their way to and from France, schools and university groups already use it, and a community cafe and open days would all contribute to income. We hope that Portsmouth City Council can be persuaded not to dispose of such an important part of the history of our City to the highest bidder. Under a Local Government Act, they have to achieve Best Value, but this means what is best to secure the building's future, rather than the highest price. Instead, we are asking them to lease it to a local trust who will cherish it, invite the community to enjoy and use it, and keep it open to the public. If you would like to help, please contact me through the editor.

John Goodall, Portsmouth Heritage Watch

Decaying Public Heritage

At a time when the country has never been richer, it is extraordinary that public bodies claim not to have the money to maintain their historic properties. Block Mills, Grade I because of its importance in the world history of technology is still in limbo between the MOD and English Heritage. The Commissioners came down to see it last month, but defence sources are still saying they cannot afford to carry out the urgent repairs of upwards of a million pounds, since defence budgets are not funded to repair historic infrastructure. There is an exciting, entirely appropriate plan to use it as a centre for dockyard history and crafts, but how is it to be financed?

Portsmouth City Council has cut the budget of its historic buildings to non-existence. Southsea Castle, which was briefly open after Christmas has the seaward platform closed as 'dangerous' and buckets in the keep - both because the stonework joints have not been repaired. Wymering Manor has a four year bill outstanding amounting to £150,000 which meant the common room and a large dormitory above have been closed all that time. The Guildhall maintenance, which is meant to be shared with the catering firm which occupies it, is not being done....

How can a city which claims so much for 'Maritime Heritage' and has one of the most popular heritage locations in the UK allow this to continue? As every householder knows, a stitch in time - essential, regular maintenance, saves nine. Bad housekeeping only results in huge bills later. Even in the severe financial constraints the city is paying another £100,000 to get the tower lift going. It continues to create posts for 'Strategy Officer' at up to £27,000. This makes no sense to us. Does it to you?

Celia Clark

Craftspeople in short supply - yet popular university course to close?

Saveomega.org.uk

Since 1989 if you wanted to learn gilding, specialist plasterwork, woodcarving, woodgraining, marble finishes, scagliola... there has been a course in Portsmouth where you could do it. Currently based in the Omega Centre in Somerstown, and now an HND or degree in Restoration and Decorative Studies, it is probably unique in the whole country. Past students worked on the restoration of Uppark, Windsor Castle, Cardiff Castle... they taught gilding to the Vietnamese, designed stained glass for Manchester Football Club, conserved and restored St. Agatha's church and its collection, brought Emmanuel Emmanuel's lovely cast iron angel in Canoe Lake back to life, gilded the dress circle of the Theatre Royal - yet the university proposes to close the course. The Vice Chancellor says that it costs £2000 to £3000 more per student than others in the Art, Design and Media faculty - although he has not produced any credible figures to back this up.

The full complement of 16 students have not been attracted, because the university did not permit independent advertising. English Heritage and the Construction Industry Training Board launched their report on the shortage of heritage building craft skills at West Dean College on 26 January - which highlighted many vacancies for gilders, woodcarvers and fibrous plasterers in the south east. The National Trust, Prince Charles, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, Georgian Group, Weald and Downland Museum and many others have written in support of the course, but they all get the same answer: Professor Craven feels that the closure is justified in terms of low student recruitment and high cost. What would really help would be if English Heritage or the Construction Industry Training Board could come up with extra sources of funding. If you feel moved to support the students' campaign - website above - you may like to make your case to the university chair of governors at University House, Winston Churchill Ave., Portsmouth, PO1 2UP.

Celia Clark

Southern Comfort 2005, Farnham

Thirty six members of sixteen Civic Societies of Southern England were greeted by the Chairman, Victor Tichener and the Secretary Dr Gordon Harris and then formally welcomed by Sir Ray Tindle, President of the Farnham Society, at the annual meeting of Southern Comfort at the Maltings on Saturday 12th November,

The meeting was held in the Long Kiln of the Maltings, a once working brewery that had been saved from demolition and subsequently restored by a group of Farnham residents.

The first item on the morning agenda was a talk on Conservation Area Appraisals, presented by Miss Geraldine Molony, Principal Planning Officer, Waverley Borough Council. The speaker highlighted the excellent relationship between the several cultural and amenity societies concerned with heritage in Farnham, and the Borough Council. Following wide consultation (with 560 organisations) in the transition from the Local Plan to the Local Development Framework (LDF), and initiated by its enthusiastic Conservation Officer, the Borough Council had undertaken the recommended (not statutory) Appraisal of the Farnham Conservation Area. It did this by inviting a number of organisations, including The Farnham Society, to actually draft chapters of the Appraisal. Other contributors included: The Archaeological Society, The Museum and The Public Art Trust and Residents Associations together with Farnham Town Council and on Traffic, Surrey County Council (Highways)

The result is a comprehensive, illustrated supplementary planning document based on guidance from English Heritage incorporating detailed local conservation issues which can be referred to by Planning Officers and applicants for new and/or improved developments.

A number of directly related questions relating to development in conservation areas and including problems with traffic and signage were ably responded to by the speaker.

The second major session in the morning as also continued in the latter part of the afternoon was in the form of a discussion on planning and other issues, chaired by Dr Harris. He had a list of questions from the societies present and from others unable to attend. It was clear that there was a wealth of knowledge and experience amongst the delegates who did not hesitate to contribute.

The Chairman's summing-up highlighted these topics :

- Heritage Towns are not recognised as such
- English Heritage is promoting new guidance on Listed buildings
- Owners must be consulted before listing
- SE Plan – Infrastructure totally inadequate – Common consensus
- Traffic – need to balance private and public transport
- Development Applications should be subject to Pre-discussion
- Developments can be referred to Architecture Panels
- The need for (design) education of elected members and
- Sustainability - to be a legal requirement
- Master Plan concept e.g. densities of various area
- LDF - Community Involvement

After a generous buffet lunch, the visitors attended a short illustrated presentation on the growth and demise of the hop industry around Farnham and were then given a conducted tour of the building. The Maltings has been sensitively restored and now incorporates a large concert hall with tiered seating in one of the kilns and studios for emergent small enterprises in another rebuilt kiln, together with a number of smaller meeting rooms. The afternoon was made even more pleasurable by the ongoing rehearsal of Handel's Messiah, by a local choral society, in the concert hall below our meeting room.

The subject documentation plus a book, 'A Portrait of Farnham' and a gift were presented to each delegate.

In summary. This was an educational process for all; a very well organised and successful meeting at which a large number of points of interest were aired and at which there was much common agreement.

... and Southern Comfort 2006 - Portsmouth!

The next meeting of Southern Comfort will be on 7th October in Portsmouth. The main speaker will be Paul Grover of the Solent Centre for Architecture and Design. We will publish more details in the next edition.

Bob Adderley

Nuclear or not?

This article is a summary of the talk given by Roger James at our December meeting.

At present about 20 percent of our electricity -much less than 20 per cent of our total energy - is supplied by the nuclear power stations. Electricity amounts to only about a third of our energy use. There are large consumers like road and air transport that hardly come into the calculation. The question now is: when the older nuclear stations are closed -possibly by 2020 - do we replace them with new ones or can we fill the gap from renewable sources and more economical use?

Wind

Apart from hydroelectric which we have had since before the war, our other large scale source of renewable energy is wind. Solar is not a major contributor at present and not applicable to large scale plants although very suitable for widespread small scale installation. The early wind generators produced only a few hundred kilowatts, a mere drop compared with the gigawatts (thousand megawatts, million kilowatts) of the big fossil fuel stations like Didcot and Fawley. More recently wind turbines in the megawatt range have appeared and some of the early wind farms are being upgraded, At the present time about 4.1 gigawatts of wind power, on and offshore, are already installed or have planning permission. This adds up when all are working at full power to about the output of two large power stations, like Fawley or Didcot; but there is a great snag to the exploitation of most of our renewable sources - intermittency. There are many windless days and even more sunless ones - and even tide, though absolutely predictable, is predictable for when it will not produce power which is in general more than half the time twice a day.

Tide

Although we have no installed tidal power in this country, it is in many ways the most promising. A water turbine blade needs to be only a third the size of a wind turbine blade to produce nine times as much power. There are three ways of using tide – barrage on an estuary, barrage in a tidal lagoon, where water is impounded by a dam in a shallow area of sea like the Bristol Channel or the Wash, and tidal stream. Since 1968 there has been a barrage across the estuary of the river Rance in Brittany which generates about 240MW and produces the cheapest electricity in France. There have been plans for just as long to build a barrage across the Severn estuary and to use the filling and emptying of this to generate electricity - it would produce an enormous amount, intermittently of course, 1.5 GW is estimated. It has been said every time the government looks at tidal barrages they say “if only it was built 20 years ago it would be producing the cheapest electricity on the grid”, but then they say “now isn't the time to build it”. With a tidal barrage you spend billions before you get any generation at all. An Open University researcher has worked out a tidal power network of 52 sites right round Britain (including Portsmouth – Langstone, estimated at 240 MW) which, linked up, would even out the intermittency problem as there is up to a 6 hour difference between one extreme and the other. Most of his 52 sites entail barrages and most, like the Severn, are associated with serious environmental problems – flooding of valuable land etc. And there is the severe and very expensive problem of joining them up electrically. What looks more promising and less objectionable is the exploitation of the tidal stream, positioning the turbines in channels where there is a natural fast tidal current – Langstone channel is an example familiar to all of us. Experiments have been done in the Pentland Firth off the north coast of Scotland and one is being tried out in the Severn.

Biomass

Biomass is the term used for generating power from organic material – from specially grown crops like rapeseed, the coppicing of young trees for fuel, or the gas from decomposition of waste and sewage – our own waste mountain contributes a few kilowatts to the grid and the incinerator about 16 MW. Biomass has the great advantage of not being intermittent.

Hydrogen

Hydrogen which is likely to come to the fore soon may help to solve the problem of linking the power output of widely separated plants. The electricity, produced in any way, can be used to electrolyse water, breaking it down into its constituent gases, oxygen and hydrogen. Hydrogen can be piped or carried in tankers and then used to fuel gas turbines to generate electricity where it is needed, to power vehicles - or of course stored.

The development of renewable energy resources is full of promising ideas and experiments. Practically nothing but wind is in a fully developed state, yet in theory wind makes less than an ideal use of the energy available. In every direction and to tackle the intermittency problem research is needed and money. In the early 1980s, under the Thatcher government, research into wave power was axed and has only recently been restored. In the year 2003-4 the government were funding renewables to the extent of £19 million but they

were still spending £57 million on nuclear although this did include nuclear fusion which could be the ultimate saviour.

Nuclear

So I turn now to nuclear – nuclear fission. The only practicable nuclear plants at present use fission. Large atoms of uranium are split. But there is the possibility of nuclear fusion. In this, very small particles, forms of hydrogen, are forced together to produce incomparably greater amounts of energy. It is not a pipe dream. It does work in the hydrogen bomb. But so far it has proved impossible to release the energy in a controlled, non-explosive way.

There is the one relatively modern nuclear fission station in this country - Sizewell B in Suffolk which was built after an endless public inquiry in the early 1980s. It generates 1.2GW. It is of course also being said that we need nuclear and need to phase out our fossil fuel power generators in order to cut down our CO₂ emissions for the sake of global warming considerations. For dealing with CO₂ there is also the rather fantastic idea called sequestration. This amounts to capturing the gas before it goes up the chimney, and burying it underground. BP are in fact this year going to build a 350MW power plant in Scotland generating electric power from natural gas with the CO₂ being piped offshore, presumably into the hole where the oil and gas used to be.

The Thatcher government had a plan in the early 1980s for a crash programme to build a new nuclear (fission) power station every year. Sir Herman Bondi, a Nobel prize winning physicist, pointed out that the energy consumed in building the first station would be greater than it could be expected to generate in its first year of operation. This argument still applies, There's still the problem of what to do with the spent fuel. Nuclear inevitably implies the construction of big isolated plants, while renewables is a matter in some cases of very large schemes but more often of small locally spread installations lending themselves to using small amounts of local, comparatively unskilled labour

And against nuclear of course there are the well known facts about danger: the catastrophic explosion of the reactor at Chernobyl in Ukraine in 1986, the near catastrophe at Three Mile Island in the United States in 1979, and the sheer danger of the working material – plutonium. A worker could take out a handful of the stuff and in a few weeks he'd have enough for a bomb. I went into more detail on these matters in my lecture which is on the web site. It does mean that a nuclear station has to have a high degree of internal security. As long ago as the 1970s the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution came out strongly against nuclear power, saying that it was not appropriate in a free society that the production of something as mundane and essential as energy should entail the policing of the factories producing it in a way appropriate only for a highly secret arms establishment.

This is a 30-year old opinion. Nothing has happened since to invalidate it. It is still my opinion.

NB Roger attended two one-day conferences during 2005 at the Open University. One was called Nuclear or Not?, the title he took for his lecture. He has also subscribed for several years to the monthly journal RENEW published by NATTA, the Network for Alternative Technology and Technology Assessment.



The Lord Mayor of Portsmouth, Cllr Robin Sparshatt presented certificates on 3rd February for the commended schemes in the society's Design Awards. With the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress are Tony Pepper of BAE Systems (2nd from left), Simon Smith of Smith and Langton Ltd, (6th from left), Daniel Sutton from the Florence House Hotel (7th from left), Commander Mike Tomkinson RNR (3rd from right) together with members of the society.

Peter Cobb - Fortifications buff, enthusiast and colleague

It is with sadness that we report the death of Peter Cobb, a long serving member of the Portsmouth Society.

Peter Cobb was altogether a very special person. Deane first met Peter in 1972 when Fort Widley was my restoration project for Portsmouth City Council Historic Buildings Bureau. Peter appeared one day at the fort, bubbling with enthusiasm, and gave me valuable information on the fort's history including its important role in World War II.

He ran his own research group, the UK Fortifications Club. Over the years our paths crossed on many occasions, and he was always full of his latest exploit or research, such as the discoveries he made at the national Records Office or locally at Portsmouth City Records Office. As Lewis Sharp says, in his interest in things historical, Peter was often described as an eccentric, occasionally as an obsessive and sometimes in less flattering terms. In these sophisticated times, we know a bit more about what makes people like Peter tick, but remember this; it is people like Peter - whether they are bringing to life the history of Fortifications, or restoring steam engines or re-creating the life of a Roman soldier - who actually do something. Those of us who are just spectators to this, benefit greatly from Peter and his like.

The work that he undertook in the naval base showed how much he was respected there. His role in saving HMS Victory from keeling over in the Great Storm of 1987 was legendary. It started when he got a phone call from the dockyard HQ to come and stabilise the Victory which was moving sideways in the strong wind. As you know he lived on Portsdown Hill and his mode of transport was his bicycle. He jumped on his bike, but the wind was so strong it blew him back up the hill. An SOS to the naval base brought a staff car to his house. He then got to work adjusting the supporting shores. By that time, HMS Victory had moved several inches! By his skills and that of others the vessel was saved from serious damage. He was very proud to be an adviser to the government when he was sent to Dubrovnic after it had been bombarded, to report back that the damage to the ancient fortifications was modest

Peter was a stalwart of the Palmerston Forts Society. Another story we relished hearing was his tunnel explorations at Fort Amherst at Chatham. On a group visit by the PFS, while we were eating our sandwiches Peter disappeared into the bowels of the earth complete with his gear including a miner's lamp and a great coil of rope. He surfaced inside the boundary of Brompton Barracks, to the surprise of the young Royal Engineer officers who were playing tennis, blackfaced and smiling! The two officers stopped their game and just could not believe how he had got into their sacred ground! Part of his escape kit was a bottle of rum, which seemed to be continually full - following the closure of Royal Clarence Victualling Yard...

Celia particularly valued his immense knowledge, which extended to fortifications all over the world. You only had to mention a place: Pendine Sands or a firing range in Northumberland - and he'd probably explored it - and could recall the amazing amount he knew about it at the drop of a hat.

Deane last had an update from him in the library one afternoon in December before he was starting his evening shift at the Post Office. Little did he realise that it would be the last time he saw him. His health and that of his wife Margaret was of great concern to us, because she had been unwell for many years. He was sadly marked by his work over the years in the naval base, and he was certainly not alone in that experience. He was 63 years old, and we shall miss his colourful character and his immense knowledge.

Deane and Celia Clark

The Fort Hunter



"I am sure that I left my bike here somewhere!"

Mary Yoward - leading member of Hampshire Mills Group and Hampshire Industrial Archaeological Society

It is with immense sadness that we report the sudden death of Mary Yarwood, member of the Society and very much a team with her husband Tony. She was a magistrate, a member of the Inland Revenue Complaints Commission and a qualified pharmacist. She and Tony assisted Ray Riley with the computing involved in preparing the Society's book for the publishers.

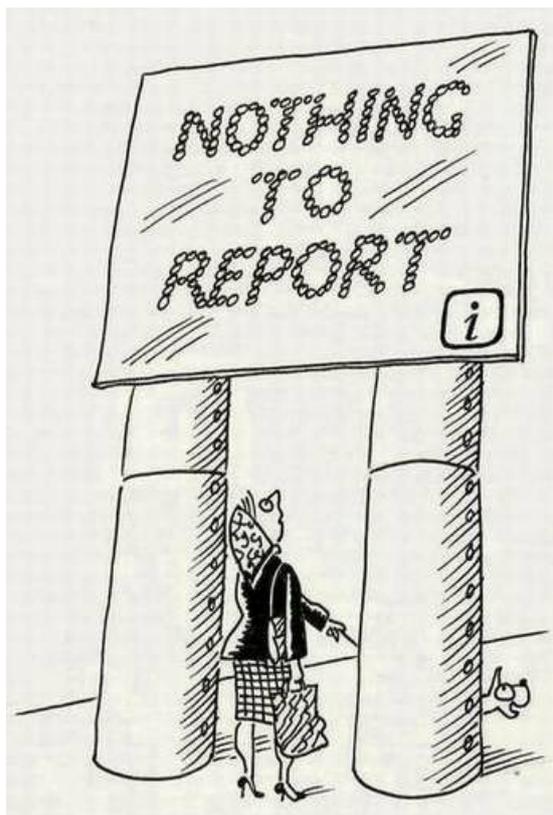
Nothing to Report

This cartoon, by Pat Drennan, was inspired by the arrival of huge twin poles erected recently in Broad Street for flood warning signs and also by the long-standing illuminated signs on the approaches to the Isle of Wight car ferry. The latter spend most of the time glowing but saying nothing useful. None of them add to or enhance the visual aspect of the local environment. Surely, if Broad Street is flooded then we'll see the water so why do we need signs? And if we must have them why can't they be mounted on the same columns as the street lights?

Council engineers across the country have a love affair with signage and street furniture. Others - residents, local groups and amenity societies like ourselves, have a constant battle questioning the need for and design of these, especially where conservation areas are concerned. Contractors have huge stockpiles of "bog standard" poles which they are only too pleased to plant in the middle of pavements and footpaths (but never anywhere near the path of a motor vehicle, you notice).

Thanks to the efforts of the Friends of Old Portsmouth, the "flood" signs have been modified but, alas, not abandoned. Some forward-thinking authorities have started to remove street clutter - Kensington High Street in London is a high-profile example - and we eagerly await the revelation to hit the streets of Portsmouth.

John Holland



St George's Road Pelican crossing - a small victory for the Society

After a lot of correspondence and two attendances at the public meeting of the Executive Member for Transport and Traffic, we have at last secured the reopening of the St George's Road Pelican crossing and the removal of the hurdles which physically prevented pedestrians from crossing this busy road. Spurious reasons had been advanced for keeping it closed. One was that the opening of a zebra crossing opposite St Thomas's Street, two hundred yards away, had made it unnecessary. Another was that it was contrary to regulations to have a Pelican across three lanes of traffic. Persistence has paid off, and it is now open.

RJ

For "Meetings and Events" please turn to page 2

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