



Submarine Memorial Chapel of St Nicholas, Fort Blockhouse

Overview

Heritage Category:

Listed Building

Grade:

II

List Entry Number:

1470286

Date first listed:

13-Nov-2020

Statutory Address:

Haslar Road, Gosport, Hampshire, PO12 2AB

Map



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(http://mapservices.HistoricEngland.org.uk/printwebservicehle/StatutoryPrint.svc/542088/HLE_A4L_Grade|HLE_A3L_Grade.pdf

The PDF will be generated from our live systems and may take a few minutes to download depending on how busy our servers are. We apologise for this delay.

This copy shows the entry on 18-Nov-2020 at 10:49:37.

Location

Statutory Address:

Haslar Road, Gosport, Hampshire, PO12 2AB

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County:

Hampshire

District:

Gosport (District Authority)

Parish:

Non Civil Parish

National Grid Reference:

SZ6262899342

Summary

Anglican chapel. Built in 1917 to commemorate Royal Navy and Allied submariners lost at sea during the First World War.

Reasons for Designation

The Submarine Memorial Chapel of St Nicholas, built in 1917 at the artillery fort and submarine base known as Fort Blockhouse (HMS Dolphin), is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

Architectural interest:

* as an exceptionally rare example of a submariners' memorial chapel in England; * for the elegant interior, including a barrel-vaulted ceiling, raised and fielded timber panels to the walls separated by pilasters, a moulded cornice, and good quality stained glass windows dedicated to individual submariners and submarine squadrons; * as a well-preserved First World War memorial chapel that is largely unaltered.

Historic interest:

* as a memorial chapel to the Submarine Service of the Royal Navy whose critical role in naval warfare was affirmed in the First World War; * wartime submarine service was extremely hazardous and this memorial chapel is especially poignant given its location at Fort Blockhouse (HMS Dolphin), the principal base and spiritual home of Britain's Submarine Service during the C20, from which many submariners went to sea and lost their lives; * for its historic association with Fort Blockhouse, a bastioned artillery fort that, historically, was central to the defence of Portsmouth Harbour in the C18 and C19, subsequently becoming a Royal Engineers establishment in the late C19, before serving as a principal submarine base during the C20.

Group value:

* with the scheduled artillery fort, the Submarine Escape Training Tower (SETT), as well as the submariners' memorial stone, the former guardhouse, Thames Block, Arrogant Block, the Admiralty boundary stone, the cannon bollard and the former gatehouse datestone at Fort Blockhouse, all Grade II. In addition, with the Grade II-listed Submariners' Memorial at Clayhall Royal Navy Cemetery, Haslar.

History

Fort Blockhouse is sited on the western side of the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour at the end of a peninsula joined to Haslar by a narrow neck of land. A timber blockhouse was recorded on the site in the early C15. It stood opposite The Round Tower (NHLE 1386901) on the eastern side of the harbour entrance; a chain between the two securing the entrance against enemy ships. In about 1538 the west side was refortified with the addition of Lymeden's Bulwark but by the late C16 the fortifications were derelict. In the late C17, during the Second Dutch War (1672-1678), concerns over the vulnerability of naval dockyards to attack led to new schemes by the great fortress engineer Sir Bernard de Gomme to strengthen Portsmouth's defences. An L-shaped battery was built on the site. A plan of 1668 shows a fort with defences facing the land and sea. In about 1709, there was major reconstruction work. The fort's south-west defences were considerably strengthened with a redan, moat and outer work, as well as a south-east sea battery. The remaining north-west and north-east sides of the fort were enclosed by oak palisades with an angled bastion to the north. In the early C19 further work was undertaken, including the northwards extension of the western face of the west demi-bastion and extensive remodelling of the sea battery. Between 1845 and 1848, the sea battery was further strengthened

and new casemates were built on the north and the eastern sides of the fort, as well as a limestone-faced north bastion. However, the advent of larger rifled cannon meant the defences became increasingly obsolescent as the C19 wore on.

In 1873 Fort Blockhouse was taken over by the Royal Engineers who were engaged in the use of fixed minefields as a means of harbour defence. A loading shed, workshops, mess room, boat and cable sheds, and a jetty were built. In 1904, the fort became a submarine base with the addition of new jetties and submariners accommodation. The hulk HMS Dolphin was also brought to the site to provide further accommodation and in 1912 gave its name to the newly established independent command. During the First World War, the base was the Royal Navy's principal submarine depot and a memorial chapel was erected in 1917. A mock submarine control room known as an 'Attack Teacher', was also erected along the northern curtain wall; only traces in the brickwork now remain. After the war, the outer C18 defence works were reduced, the moat partly infilled, and several buildings constructed within the fort interior, outside the main gate and surrounding it. In 1935 to 1937, a new headquarters was built for Rear Admiral, Submarines (commander of the service) with an operations room and communications facilities. At the outbreak of the Second World War, HMS Dolphin was home to 5th Submarine Flotilla. Operations were conducted in the Channel and the Bay of Biscay, and in June 1944 X-craft from HMS Dolphin were used to mark the D-Day landing beaches. After the conflict HMS Dolphin resumed its role as the main base for the submarine service, rising in prominence in the mid-1960s when the service provided the country's nuclear deterrent. The base expanded with many new buildings on the land to the south-west of the peninsula. However, the end of the Cold War in 1991 led to a major reappraisal of defence requirements, and HMS Dolphin closed in 1998. The Submarine School was transferred to HMS Raleigh at Torpoint, Cornwall, and the Defence Medical College was established at Fort Blockhouse; the base being occupied by 33 Field Hospital. In 2016 the government confirmed that Fort Blockhouse was to close; the estimated date for disposal is 2022.

The Submarine Memorial Chapel is dedicated to St Nicholas, the patron saint of sailors, and was built on top of the North Bastion of Fort Blockhouse in 1917 to commemorate submariners who lost their lives during the First World War. The aftermath of the war saw a huge wave of commemoration; a result of both the huge impact on communities of the loss of three quarters of a million British lives, and also the official policy of not repatriating the dead: therefore memorials provided the main focus of grief felt at this great loss. The inability to perform burials following losses at sea was a common part of the naval experience and had led over previous years to the erection of memorials to sailors of the Royal Navy, Merchant Marine, and other services such as the RNLI. One such memorial is situated at the nearby Clayhall Royal Navy Cemetery, Haslar, and commemorates those who died in four disasters to A-Class submarines between 1904 and 1912; illustrating the perilous nature of the occupation at this time (Submariner's Memorial, Grade II-listed, NHLE No 1428138). The First World War was the first arena in which submarines would play a significant military role. Britain had 57 operational submarines at the beginning of the war, with 15 under construction. Their most important function was the defence of Atlantic merchant shipping convoys against German U-boat attacks, which intensified after Germany announced the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare from 1 February 1917. At the war's end Britain had a fleet of 137 serving boats, with a further 78 under construction. A total of 54 boats were lost during the war and with them the lives of 138 officers and 1,225 men; approximately one-third of the Submarine Service's personnel. The Second World War also proved extremely hazardous for submarine crews. A total of 74 submarines sank of 206 that were put to sea and 3508 submariners perished or were captured out of 9310 personnel who served.

The Submarine Memorial Chapel of St Nicholas pre-dates the National Submariners' War Memorial on Victoria Embankment, London, which was unveiled in 1922 (Grade II*-listed, NHLE No 1079109). The chapel contains a large number of memorial items, each dedicated to specific submariners or submarine squadrons. Among these are: the standards of The Queen's Colour and the International Submariners Association, an icon, prayer desks, a missal stand, lectern, an altar cross, candle sticks, a sanctuary lamp, two fonts, crosses, vases, a chalice, a wafer box, a pewter bowl, and prayer books. On the south-east wall are chaplain's boards and a list of HM Submarines lost on service. In 2018, a team of sailors from Victory Squadron, HMS Collingwood, re-painted the memorial chapel ahead of a visit of family members related to Admiral Talbot, Flag Officer Submarines in the 1930s. Near the entrance of Fort Blockhouse is a submariners' memorial stone.

Details

Anglican chapel. Built in 1917 to commemorate Royal Navy and Allied submariners lost at sea during the First World War.

MATERIALS: painted brick with stone dressings and a slate roof covering.

PLAN: a single-cell plan extended with a lean-to at the north-east end providing a sacristy.

EXTERIOR: the chapel is orientated north-east to south-west and situated on top of the North Bastion of Fort Blockhouse. It is a single-storey gabled building with timber bargeboards and a slate-covered roof. The building has a single window to each elevation; bull's eye or oeil-de-boeuf windows to the gable ends and mullion and transom windows containing casements to the north-west and south-east elevations. A timber five-panelled door provides the main entrance into the chapel at the western end of the north-west elevation. Above the doorway is a timber sign with an incised inscription: HM SUBMARINES MEMORIAL CHAPEL. On the central panel of the door is a further inscription set beneath a crown: THIS DOOR IS DEDICATED TO THE PROUD MEMORY OF ADMIRAL SIR CLAUD BARRINGTON BARRY KBE CB DSO FLAG OFFICER SUBMARINES 1942-1944. THEY COMMITTED THEMSELVES UNTO THE SEA. There are Latin crosses at the apex of each gable. Attached to the north-east end is a single-storey lean-to which serves as a sacristy. It has a two-over-two paned sash window and a timber four-panelled door. Attached to the south-west end is a single-storey flat-roofed addition with two low timber doors, which was probably a store associated with the North Bastion.

INTERIOR: the entrance leads directly into the nave of the chapel, which has a barrel-vaulted ceiling, below which are raised and fielded timber panels to the walls separated by pilasters, and a moulded cornice. The cornice situated above the altar at the north-east end is painted with the words: I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE SAITH THE LORD. There is leaded stained glass to the windows: the bull's eye windows contain an image of Christ above the altar and Mary at the opposite gable end. The four casements depict: St Nicholas, with a dedication to Lt FRC Talbot and Lt EB Talbot RN of HM Submarines Thames and Snapper respectively; St Christopher, with a dedication to Lt GA Adlard RN HM of Submarine Unique; St Paul, with a dedication to Lt-Cmdr EP Tomkinson DSO RN and Officers and men of HM Submarine Spearfish; and St Andrew, with a dedication to Lt-Cmdr JH Forbes DSO RN and Officers and men of HM Submarine Spearfish. Attached to the south-west wall are two carved wooden chaplain's boards and built into the western end of the south-east wall is a display stand for a book of remembrance. To the left of the altar is a timber door leading into a small sacristy.

Sources

Books and journals

Evans, D, *Arming the Fleet: The Development of the Royal Ordnance Yards, (1770-1945)*

Hall, K, *HMS Dolphin: Gosport's Submarine Base, (2001)*

Moore, D, *Solent Papers No.13 - Fort Blockhouse and Fort Monckton, (2014)*

Williams, G, *The Portsmouth Papers No.30: The Western Defences of Portsmouth Harbour 1400-1800, (1979)*

Other

Francis, P, and Crisp, G, *Military Command and Control Organisation, report for English Heritage (2008)*

Historic England, *Screening for Potential Listing Report: Fort Blockhouse, Gosport, Hampshire (2020)*

Legal

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

End of official listing

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