

## CHARACTER AREA 5: *Gun Wharf*

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE



CHARACTER AREA 5 - GUN WHARF  
 --- CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

*Gun Wharf* is the original location of the Tudor Dockyard. However, its principle surviving significance is as a partially complete 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century ordnance complex where cannons and other ordnance were stored. The principal surviving buildings are the Carpenter's Shop and Armoury, the Machine Shop, (now Chatham library). Also surviving is the former Storekeepers House (now the Command House pub) – a fine Queen Anne house of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The belowground archaeology is of national significance due to the combination of the location of medieval Chatham, the site of the first Tudor Dockyard and the ordnance use. The early origin of naval shipbuilding in Medway gives the *Gun Wharf* character area a unique significance within the Brompton Lines Conservation Area.

One of the largest buildings that would have stood on this site was *Gun Carriage House*, which probably would have been built fifty years after the *Storekeepers House*. The storekeeper held a much more important role than the quartermaster and was in a position to amass personal wealth by manipulating government contracts. There is

another storekeepers house adjacent to the ordnance depot at *Upnor*, behind *Upnor Castle* as viewed from the river. The *Gun Carriage House*, as the name suggests, was used for storing gun carriages, and later became a general store. The building has since been demolished and is now the site of a car park.



There were two main phases of construction in the development of defences designed to control the main road to the dockyard. The first was in 1755 and the second was the result of major re-planning in 1803 and forms the present day *Barrier Wall* and

Ditch that bounds the southern edge of the site. These are a continuation of the Barrier Ditch on the hillside above, changing in form to a wall and water-filled ditch across the flood plain and are of national significance. The Council-owned Riverside 1 building is constructed in the former ditch but the wall, complete with its fire-step from which soldiers could fire, remains substantially intact and capable of reinstatement. The importance of this part of the defences has recently been recognised by their designation as a 'scheduled ancient monument'.

The historic relationship of Gun Wharf to the rebuilt Amherst citadel after 1803 is important to mention here. Guns sited at Amherst citadel had designed fields of fire onto the river, over the roofs of ordnance buildings at Gun Wharf. This was a clear constraint on how high the structures on Gun Wharf could rise. When considering the future of the area it is this historic constraint and the buried archaeology of the character area that will form the main factors to consider.



Former Storekeepers House (Command House Pub) with the spire of St Mary's Church above

The remainder of the Gun Wharf site – principally the area occupied by the present Lloyds Building is also within the conservation area. This was the site of the 'Grand' and 'New' Storehouses that were built on the site in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. These sizeable structures replaced earlier structures. Although all historic aboveground features have been lost there may be surviving belowground archaeology. This part of the site is in an extremely prominent setting in immediate proximity to the storehouses of the Historic Dockyard. The Lloyds building itself is of some significance as a good example of mid 70s office architecture designed by ARUP - a leading engineering and architectural firm. The building's considerable architectural merit is that, despite its bulk, it is a discrete neighbour to the Dockyard.

The conservation area also takes in St Mary's Church - an important landmark on the high ground overlooking Gun Wharf. It was founded before AD 905 and indicates the site of medieval Chatham. In the eighteenth century land was compulsorily purchased to build the Lines and the

demolition of many buildings resulted in Chatham town centre moving southwards to its present location. St Mary's Church was rebuilt in the classical style in 1788 (with the destruction of most of the medieval fabric) and again in the Gothic style between 1884 and 1903. Although now no longer a church the building retains its historic fittings and is Grade II listed. The church remains a significant reminder of the pre-military origins of Chatham.



There is a possibility that parts of the original docks, wharfs and buildings of the Tudor dockyard are preserved intact under the current buildings and car park. Desk based research has been undertaken as a part of the first steps in understanding the site and any development within the area will require further archaeological evaluation to test what remains. The foundations of the demolished Ordnance buildings may also be preserved intact under the car park.

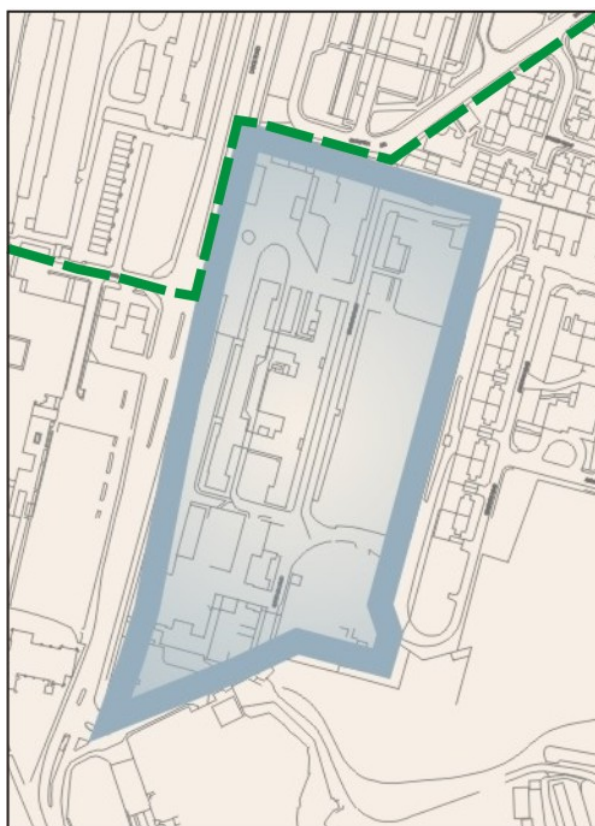
*Chatham Dockyard from Fort Pitt. The Lloyds building is prominent to the right of the dockyard warehouses.*

The remaining buildings are a fragment of what was once a sizable depot. The Command House, Carriage Shed and Store are of interest both architecturally and historically, particularly as they are rare examples of surviving ordinance buildings. Riverside One is of limited interest as a representative of the later stage of building in the yard. Any historic interest that the building does have should be considered along side the interest in the barrier ditch below it.



## Character Area 6: *Kitchener Barracks*

The conservation area includes the Kitchener Barracks. These were originally constructed in 1757 as the Chatham Infantry Barracks, one of earliest and largest purpose built barracks in Medway at that time. The barracks were required to garrison the lines, as opposed to temporary encampments established at times of a threat of invasion. Whilst most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century barrack buildings have been demolished the original plan form of the site survives. The military character derives from the large parade ground and the rectilinear layout of highly ordered and repetitive elements. The present barracks is a largely 1930s complex of imposing character and prominent in the landscape as a result, which preserve the basic boundaries, topography, and layout of the original barracks, which should be respected when the site comes under future consideration for renewal.



CHARACTER AREA 6: KITCHENER BARRACKS  
— PROPOSED CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

The site was surrounded by a high wall, part of which still exist as do a few buildings from the former Infantry Barracks, albeit in much changed form. The most prominent of these surviving buildings is two-storey early 19<sup>th</sup> C building, opposite the entrance to Fort Amherst, which was the former office for the Barrack Clerk and Barrack Sergeant and included a bed store. The building was previously the Ordnance store of 1806 and belongs to the period of buildings associated with Gun Wharf.



Kitchener barracks - Former Barrack Clerk's office, originally the Ordnance Store dated 1806.

Outside the barrack wall is a small triangular area of open space on which there stands a fine equestrian statue of Kitchener the statue is owned by the RSME. The Barrack Clerk's Office (Ordnance Store) and this area could enhance the setting of the Fort, particularly the roadway out of Amherst Guard House and St. Mary's Church, if restored. The group of buildings, statue and space makes a significant contribution to the conservation area.



Kitchener barracks – surviving 1757 barrack block

There is a further surviving barrack block building from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, towards the north-east of the site. Although much altered internally, its survival is significant. Its early alterations were likely to have been the result of the 1858 Barracks Commission, which condemned the entire barracks as prejudicial to the health of soldiers. The report recommended major changes, which were implemented as evidenced in record drawings of 1864.

The boundary wall facing Dock Road incorporates part of the surviving brick façade of the Soldiers Institute of 1861. It forms a further rare reference to the past history of the use of the site on which it stands and is in a prominent position overlooking Dock Road. It should be carefully incorporated into any future renewal of the site.

The original parade ground to the east of the barracks survives and as such forms a part of the special character and appearance of the barracks.

The potential for buried archaeology – both the remains of earlier barracks and later improvements - must be considered as a high possibility. Further studies need to be undertaken to assess the standing structures and buried archaeology. This will guide future decisions and should not stand in the way of new development unless the impact on the significance of the historic structures, both standing and buried, was to be extreme.

It has been suggested that the 1930s buildings were commissioned and designed under the aegis of General Montgomery. If this were found to be the case it would add to their significance. Of more importance is the prominence of the site in providing a foreground to the Lines in many views.

Collectively the surviving features of the pre-1930's barracks are of some significance in themselves. In addition they allow an understanding of the original layout and character of the barracks. This site represents a unique opportunity for the regeneration of Chatham and must respond positively to the special character of the Brompton Lines Conservation Area.