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A redeveloped and rebranded area of Portsmouth waterfront

## History

- The area has a long standing naval history. Records suggest that in the 12th century a man-made dock was in place, and Richard I considered the site a good place for a larger harbour given its sheltered position and the natural protection offered by the Isle of Wight.<sup>1</sup>
- The area continued as a holding dock for European ships until the late 1600s. Extensive land reclamation began throughout the period as the need for naval weapon stores and larger docks began. At the peak of Britain's naval warfare, Portsmouth became the primary dockyards and the city grew around it. The Grand Storehouse was built in 1814 and a large section of it has been restored and still stands in Gunwharf Quays today.<sup>2</sup>
- For the most part the area now occupied by the Gunwharf Quays complex was open sea until the 18th century. Further land reclamation allowed for the further growth of the docks and a strong ship building and servicing industry grew. By 1920, the MOD owned a large area of the seafront and the 'stone frigate' HMS Vernon (an underwater mine and torpedo training facility) was established.<sup>3</sup>
- Heavy aerial bombing during the Second World War destroyed over 6,600 homes in the city and while some naval operations and stores had to be relocated, the dockyard managed to continue to operate. However after the war and through to the 1960s there was a high decline in the UK's shipbuilding industries and by 1984 the dockyard closed.<sup>4</sup>

## References

<sup>1</sup> [www.historyinportsmouth.co.uk/places/hms-vernon.htm](http://www.historyinportsmouth.co.uk/places/hms-vernon.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Underwood, Michael (2015). *Gunwharf Quays: The History, Architecture, Conservation and Development of a Remarkable Military Site*. Portsmouth: Tricorn

<sup>3</sup> [www.portsmouth-guide.co.uk/local/gwhfquays.htm](http://www.portsmouth-guide.co.uk/local/gwhfquays.htm)

<sup>4</sup> [www.portsmouthhq.org/buildings/dry-docks](http://www.portsmouthhq.org/buildings/dry-docks)

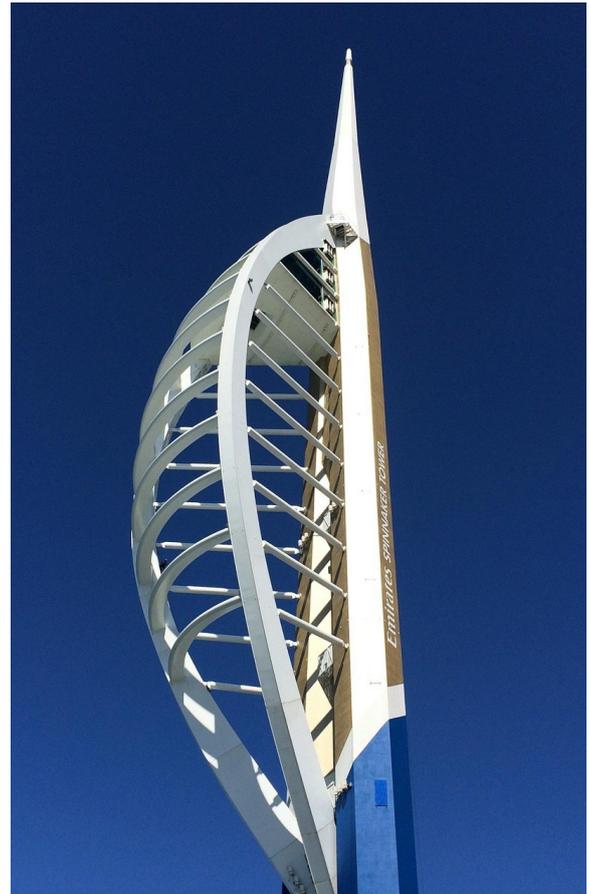
- In 1986 HMS Vernon ceased operations and this signalled the decline of naval activities in Portsmouth. The naval base closed in 1995 when it was sold to Portsmouth City Council who themselves then sold it onto private developers, Berkeley Group with the aim to rejuvenate what was by then a fairly derelict city centre.<sup>5</sup>
- In 1999 residents began to move into the newly developed waterside apartments and in 2001, Gunwharf Quays centre opened to the public.<sup>6</sup>

### The redevelopment project<sup>7</sup>

- Further areas of land had to be drained and reclaimed, in large part to allow for the building of underground car parks.
- Some buildings were kept as historical markers in the area - the old customs house was restored and is now a bar and many of the apartments that were once officers' housing were brought up to modern standards.
- The redevelopment cost a total of £140 million, with £100 million coming from private investment and £40 million coming from central government under the Portsmouth Harbour Renaissance Project.

### Features of the area<sup>8</sup>

- Gunwharf Quays now comprises of over 120 outlet style shops, cafes, restaurants and entertainment facilities over 330,000 sq ft. The site also hosts yachting events and music and food festivals.
- Around 7 million people visit the site every year.
- The site is currently privately owned by Landsec, a real estate investment trust and FTSE 100 company. They own a number of high profile developments across the UK.



The Spinnaker Tower now marks the seafront at Gunwharf Quays



Apartments on Millenium Walkway and No.1 Gunwharf Tower, locally known as 'The Lipstick'.

### References

<sup>5</sup> [www.gqrc.net/gunwharf-quays-history/](http://www.gqrc.net/gunwharf-quays-history/)

<sup>6</sup> [www.gqrc.net/gunwharf-quays-history/](http://www.gqrc.net/gunwharf-quays-history/)

<sup>7</sup> [www.gunwharf-quays.com/en](http://www.gunwharf-quays.com/en)

<sup>8</sup> [www.landsec.com/media/press-releases/2025/gunwharf-quays-begins-next-phase-redevelopment-sales-reach-record-highs](http://www.landsec.com/media/press-releases/2025/gunwharf-quays-begins-next-phase-redevelopment-sales-reach-record-highs)