

A black and white photograph of an ornate wooden door. The door features intricate carvings, including a large, stylized monogram at the top left and a decorative panel at the bottom right. The door is adorned with several large, round metal knobs and smaller, square metal studs. The wood grain is clearly visible, and the overall appearance is that of a well-crafted, historical piece of furniture.

Royal William Yard

Our History

The Royal William Victualling Yard

Royal William Yard was designed by architect and engineer Sir John Rennie for use by the Admiralty as a major victualling depot for the Royal Navy. It was named after King William IV (the last Lord High Admiral) and built between 1824 and 1835. Steeped in history and considered to be one of the most important groups of historic military buildings in Britain, the Yard has the largest collection of Grade I Listed military buildings in Europe.



Sir John Rennie — Architect

From the beginning

Plymouth has been involved in victualling the Royal Naval fleet since the 13th century. In the 1650s the Commonwealth government built victualling storehouses on Lambhay Hill next to Hoe Fort, with manufacturing taking place at various locations around the old harbour and a wharf providing a loading area for ships in Sutton Pool.

Following the establishment of a Royal Navy Dockyard in what would later be known as Devonport, in 1690, these victualling premises expanded substantially.

1821

The decision was made to centralise Plymouth's victualling provision in to one new location.

The plan was to consolidate various victualling activities from around the Plymouth area, including the brewing of beer, the slaughtering of live animals for fresh meat, the manufacture of barrels, the baking of bread and the production of flour; as well as providing space for administration, accommodation and large amounts of storage.

The area was chosen for its deep water channel and for its equal proximity to the Dockyard, the Hamoaze and the Sound.



View showing ships loading at Clarence — c1832

1824

An Act of Parliament sanctioned the purchase of the site and the Victualling Commissioners appointed John Rennie as architect. Work on the new Yard commenced in 1825 and the arduous task of levelling the site was carried out by convicts over a strenuous three-year undertaking which produced approximately 370,000 tons of rubble.

In the following year the Duke of Clarence (soon to be succeeded to the Throne as King William IV) laid the coping stone of the sea wall, 11ft under-water by means of a cast-iron diving bell only 6ft x 4ft.

1827

Work on the first of the buildings began in late 1827, and on the boundary walls and the basin the following year.

Once complete, they were named the Royal William Victualling Yard. It is said that at one time about 250 men were employed in the Yard, as well as officers and a superintendent.

No sooner had it been built, the intended function of the Yard began to change. Nevertheless, the Yard would continue to fulfil a crucial role in provisioning Britain's naval fleet for a further 100 years.



Entrance — The granite entrance in Cremyll Street is guarded with a 13ft high statue of King William IV, surrounded by carvings illustrating the trades that flourished inside the walls – butchers, bakers and coopers, along with carved ox heads and crossed fouled anchors, both symbols of the Naval Victualling Board.

Gatehouse & Guardhouse — To the left of the entrance is the Police House which used to be manned by an Inspector, 3 Sergeants and 12 Constables, who helped to keep pilferers' hands off the navy's food, drink and supplies.

Slaughterhouse — To the right of the entrance is the Slaughterhouse, used to produce salt beef. Between 70 and 80 head of cattle could be slaughtered simultaneously. They were transported by boat docking at Firestone Bay and led into the Yard down Slaughter Alley. Both the Slaughterhouse and Police House were given special architectural treatment by Rennie to give a good impression to visitors, using wrought limestone, granite and cast iron window frames.

Residence One & Two — Up the road to the left are the Officers' Residences. Furthest away is Residence One, which was the home of the Superintendent and the nearest, Residence Two, was for the Chief Clerk. The building was constructed in around 1830 to the plans of John Rennie Jnr. and was designed to provide four storeys of comfortable residences for the Royal Navy's Officer classes.

Firestone Bay — Beyond the residences is the entrance to the tunnel through to Firestone Bay, originally designed for allowing light provisions to be taken out to ships in the Sound when the ebb tides made access to the Basin difficult.

Mills Bakery — The building facing the flagstaff on the right of the lawn was the Mills and Bakery. Used to bake ships biscuit and bread, it was brought into use in 1843, where two 40hp steam engines drove 27 millstones capable of grinding 100 bushels of corn every hour. It also housed 12 conveyor ovens and survived six fires in its time, including a major one in 1960.

New Cooperage — To the west of the flagstaff, the long thin building is the New Cooperage, built in 1899 after the closure of the old cooperage building when the Victualling Board reduced their requirement for barrels. It housed the coopers and others tradesmen displaced by the rearrangements, including painters, wheelwrights and a host of other skilled men needed to keep the Royal Navy in perfect working order.

Marina — Next on the right comes what was originally known as the Basin, almost square at 250 feet by 200 feet and could accommodate up to six transports or merchant vessels.

Melville — Overlooking the Marina is the Melville Block, named after the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Melville. Architecturally the grandest of the buildings at the Yard, it has a superb location, fronting the Marina. It was built as a general store and incorporated a suite of offices. The entrance is surmounted by a clock and bell tower, designed by Benjamin Lewis Vulliamy, who went on to draw up the specification for the clock in the Houses of Parliament.

Brewhouse — The next building on the right, after the Marina, and capable of producing 30,000 gallons of beer per day. The beer ration ceased in 1831, before the Yard opened, as emerging technology allowed large quantities of fresh water to be carried at sea, eliminating the need for the beer. Subsequently, it was used as a slaughterhouse in 1885, a store for vegetables, meat and rum in 1891, and an artillery weapons workshop in 1936 until becoming a submarine torpedo workshop in 1971.

Factory Cooperage — Built to support the enormous demands on the supply of barrels for the storage on board ship. The lower floor was used to store sponges, rammers and carriages, while the first floor was used for the armoury, containing some 9,000 rifles, pistols, cutlasses, boarding pikes, machine guns and other quick-firing weapons.

Clarence — The final building in the Yard was named after the Duke of Clarence who became King William IV. This was used as a store for a wide variety of items: spirits, porter, vinegar and spares for small arms and other weapons.

1941

World War II — Plymouth endured the heaviest air attacks during the Blitz in 1941. However, the Yard survived unscathed.

1972

Royal Marines — Number Two Raiding Squadron occupied the Brewhouse during the war. It was using it as a store for clothing and to repair and store torpedoes.

1985

Closure Announced — The then Minister of Defence, Michael Heseltine, announced the closure of the Yard because it was no longer seen as appropriate to use a scheduled ancient monument for the storage of naval equipment.

1992

Yard Decommissioned — The Yard was eventually closed by the MOD with ownership being passed to Plymouth City Council and the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA).

2004

Urban Splash began working with SWRDA and, with the support of Plymouth City Council, started to see the Yard come alive.

2007

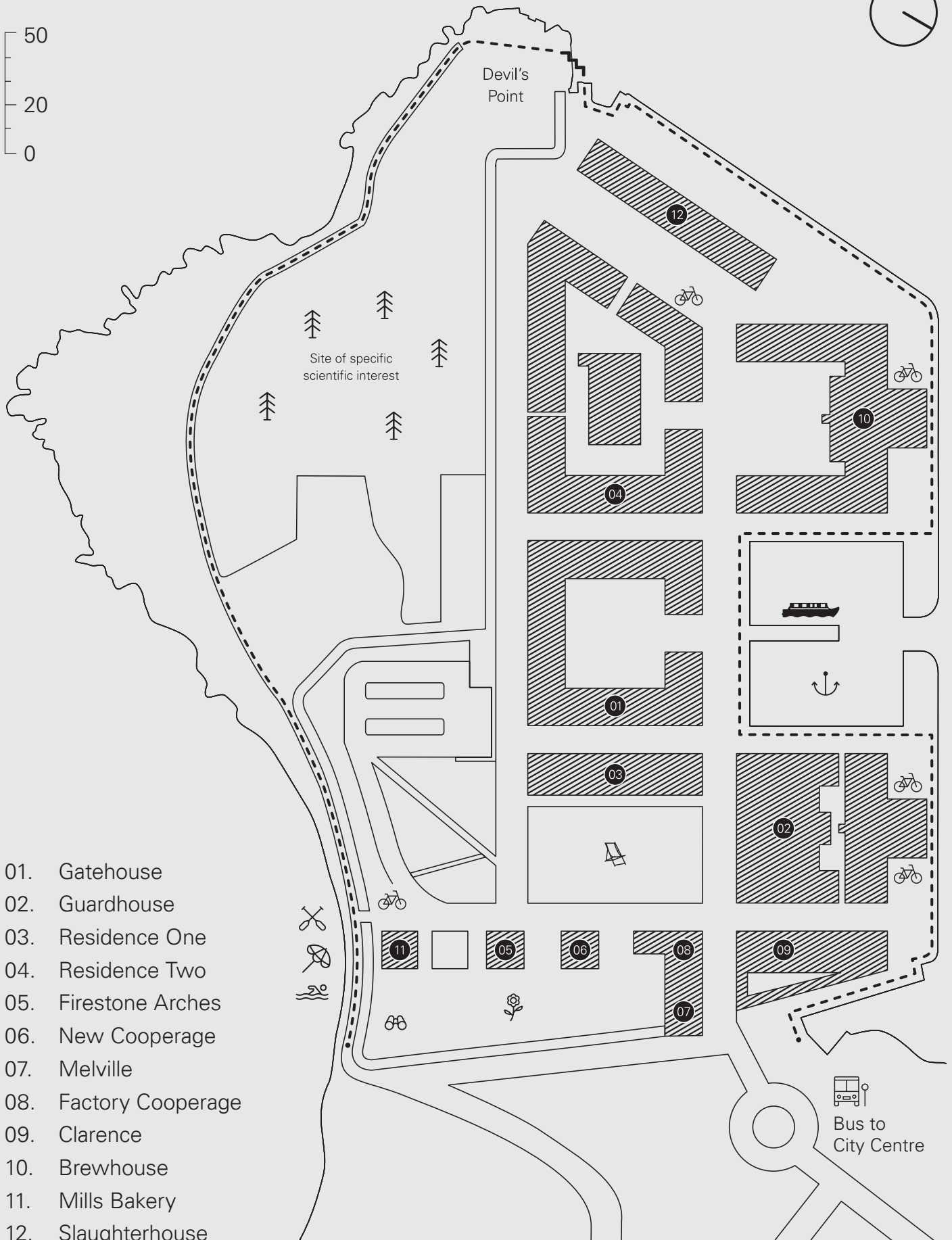
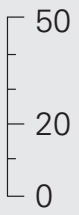
The first new residential apartments were completed, along with the opening of offices, restaurants, an outpost of the University of Plymouth, art galleries, exhibitions, the Royal William Yard Marina and the establishment of a ferry for the public.

Present Day

Today, Royal William Yard has made it as one of the South West's most talked about places and is now a buzzing neighbourhood full of homes, restaurants, bars, offices, artists spaces and a hotel.

Our Buildings

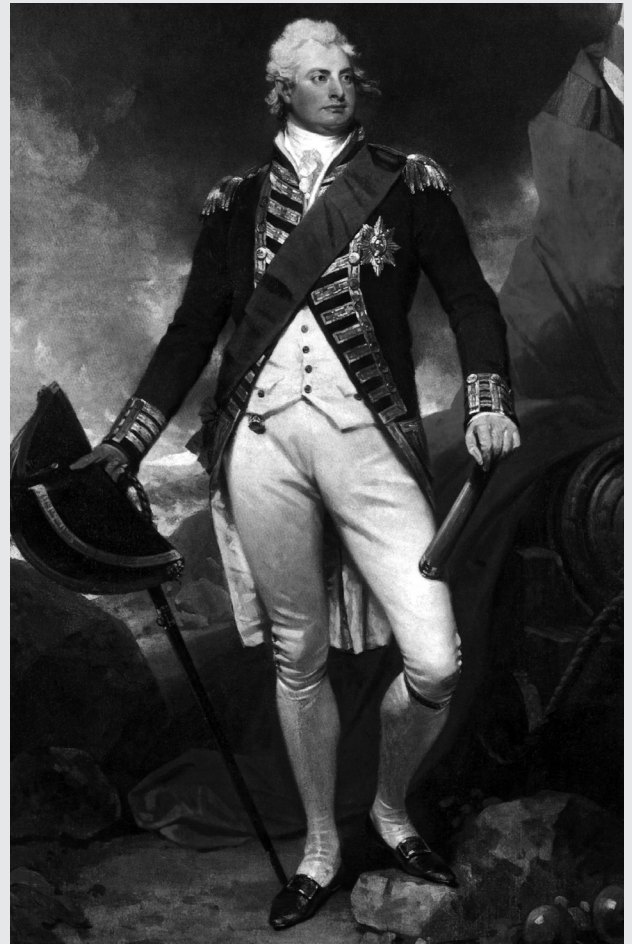
Meters



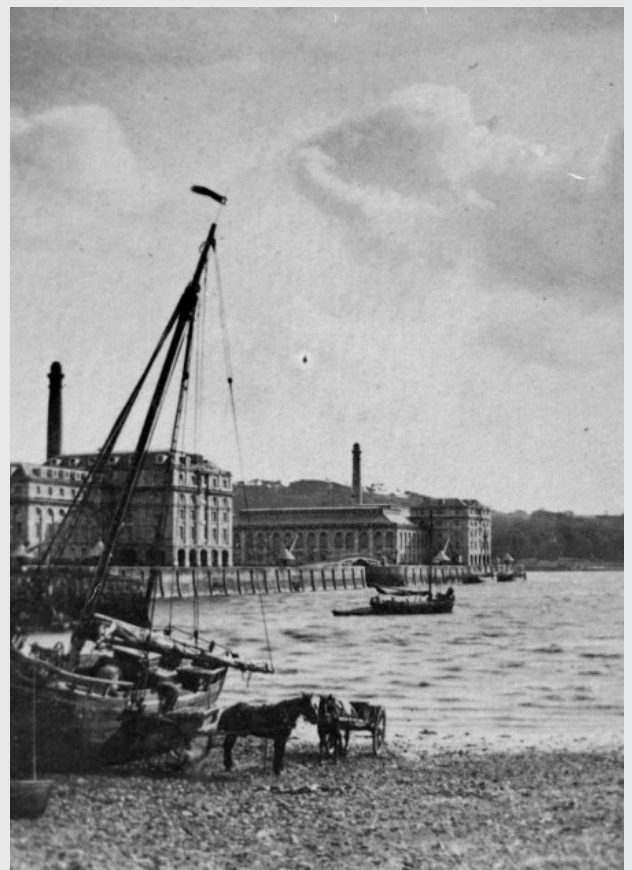
- 01. Gatehouse
- 02. Guardhouse
- 03. Residence One
- 04. Residence Two
- 05. Firestone Arches
- 06. New Cooperage
- 07. Melville
- 08. Factory Cooperage
- 09. Clarence
- 10. Brewhouse
- 11. Mills Bakery
- 12. Slaughterhouse

“At Cremill Point a fine establishment was formed in 1834 for victualling the Navy and for this purpose no place could have been better selected. Its proximity to the Dockyard, the Hamoaze and the Sound, and the great depth of water rendering it accessible at all times of the tide, enabled it to supply provisions to the different vessels of war with the greatest despatch, facility and economy, whilst its excellent internal arrangements are so designed that every article of provisions can be manufactured and supplied with equal readiness and cheapness.”

Sir John Rennie



King William IV



View of the Yard c1835



Pulling a dinghy ashore at Stonehouse Pool with Royal William Yard in the background c1890



A Cooper and his apprentice at work making barrels in Factory Cooperage



Gun barrels being stacked with pulleys in Melville Courtyard



Counting the barrels, Factory Cooperage



Packing silverware into barrels



Long Johns store



Repairing Tea Urns



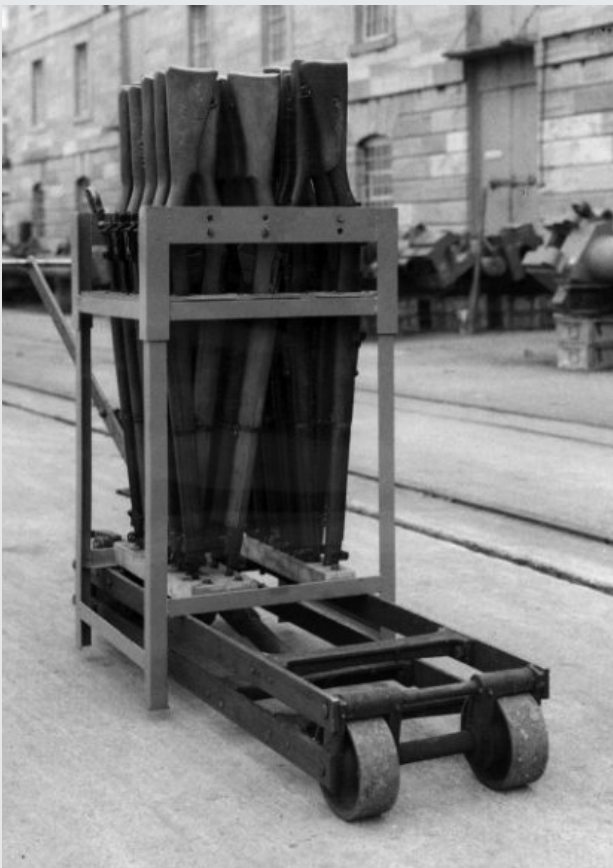
Bell Bottoms store



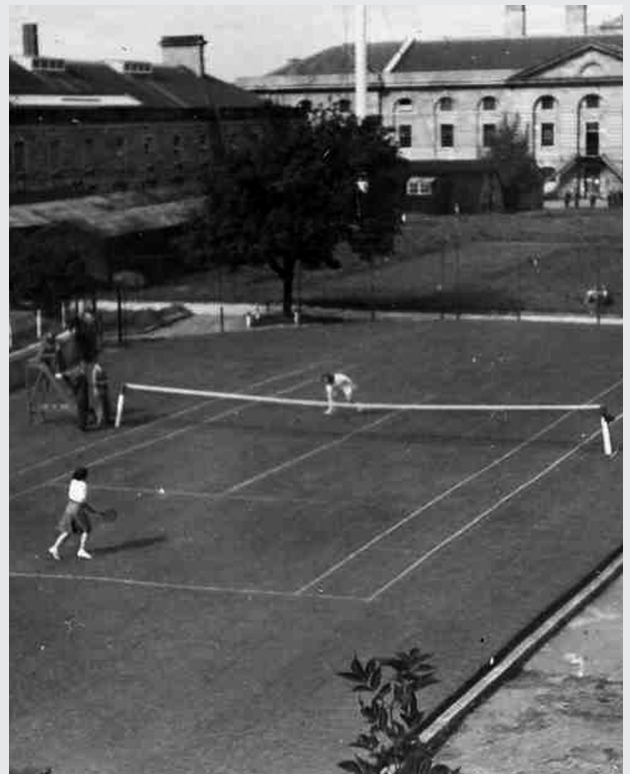
Filling barrels in Brewhouse



Loading boxes



Cache of rifles ready for shipment



Tennis on the green



Storage in the ground floor of Melville



Bags of flour stored in Mills Bakery



Melville Square c1974



Brewery and Basin c1974



Melville c1974



March past Mills Bakery



Main Entrance salute

Getting here
couldn't be easier —
arrive by car, bike,
bus, ferry or
on foot. We can
even provide you
with a mooring in
our Marina.

#yardlife

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